That's how the light gets in

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/47923552.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal (TV), Jagten | The Hunt (2012)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Lucas (Jagten), Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter/Lucas (Jagten)
Characters:	Will Graham, Lucas (Jagten), Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham's Dogs
Additional Tags:	Friends to Lovers, Enemies to Lovers, Alternate Universe - Season 3B, Domestic Fluff, Romance, Smut, Love at First Sight, Idiots in Love, Rough Sex, Tenderness, First Kiss, First Time, Poly endgame, Polyamory, Angst with a Happy Ending, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Mutual Pining, Top Lucas (Jagten), Bottom Will Graham, Top Hannibal Lecter, Trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Social Anxiety, Bashful Lucas, Charming Will Graham, Flirty Will Graham, Caring Will Graham, Protective Will Graham, Possessive Hannibal Lecter, Jealous Hannibal Lecter, Possessive Will Graham, Obsession, Dark Will Graham, Revenge, Redemption, Forgiveness, Starting Over, Falling In Love, Will's Southern Accent, Touch-Starved, Praise Kink, Pet Names, Will falls for Lucas instead of Molly in s3, Threesome - M/M/M, Vulnerability, Other Additional Tags to Be Added
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-06-16 Updated: 2024-10-01 Words: 53,435 Chapters: 8/?

That's how the light gets in

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

After Hannibal turns himself in, Will moves to Maine and embarks on a solitary new life as a fisherman and dog dad, avoiding most human interaction. But that changes one day when he sees a man who bears a striking resemblance to Hannibal. Despite the similar looks, Lucas is the complete opposite of Hannibal, so sweet, adorable and gentle. Will can't help wanting to take care of Lucas, and it's just what they both need.

Which doesn't mean that Will has stopped needing Hannibal. It's doubtful he ever could.

When Lucas moved all the way to the US and found a beautiful but isolated new home, he never expected to fall in love. From the moment Will introduces himself, Lucas is head over heels, getting the surprise of a lifetime when his feelings are returned.

From behind prison walls, Hannibal is *going* to find out about Will's new lover and he is going to *do* something about it. But what, precisely, will that something be? 👀

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

There's beauty when it's bleak

The more that I love, the less that I feel
The times that I jumped never were real
They say that all scars will heal, but I know
Maybe I won't"
-Ed Sheeran

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Will found the man sitting at the end of the dock because he went looking for him.

Although he'd "moved on" after Hannibal's arrest, trial and incarceration, it took quitting his job and moving to frigid Maine to make a clean cut. For all the good that did…

Will was pretty sure his old wounds were still bleeding. Not the scars on his skin, but the ones much deeper inside him.

It was just safer here, as if he could freeze himself out, become numb and redeemed all at once. Find some way to forge onward, knowing he had to lock a certain vital part of himself up for real this time, for everyone's good. Knowing he could not keep thinking about Hannibal, even when the thoughts clung to him daily. Kept him up at night. He tried different distractions to push the memories and pain back down, and thankfully the dogs were a constant comfort.

Nearly the only comfort he had, outside of a long, dreamless nap or a whiskey by the wood stove in his little cabin. Peace and quiet were apparently not all they were cracked up to be. An ominous and foreboding spirit seemed to pervade Will's ability to fully relax.

Almost total isolation had not done what he wanted it to, either. Instead of protecting others until he'd recovered and re-trained his mind to sanity, to morality, being alone for so long had stolen his ability to feel anything except the hollow, dull aches. They lived in the emotional scars, in the nightmares and waking flashbacks, until Will was afraid he'd disappear into the scars one day. That he'd come out here to begin anew with the best intentions, but he'd somehow buried himself in the thick Maine snow while loneliness fell in ceaseless, fresh flakes, building a bigger mountain on top of him. One day he'd wake up completely emptied out. No more feelings, no craving. Frozen solid under the weight of the past. He'd forget who he was and let his soul go numb, too.

Although Will had harbored a guilt complex for so long that it was a wild thought, he realized he did not believe he deserved this sad, meaningless facade of a daily life. Along with this came a gust of wanting that he hadn't felt in ages, not since Hannibal…

Well, this breath of life rushing into his lungs said that Will still wanted to really live, and to live well. He wanted human companionship and love. Some part of him believed in these old dreams again, as soon as he remembered how to crave. Once he let that feeling in, gave

himself that permission, he started to actually move on with his life. It wasn't so bad; it was just like waking up, and he did that every day.

Now, he had to teach himself how to keep wanting to do that for tangible reasons. Like someone to see and *be* with, something to look forward to, a belief in the future.

He sure didn't need much; he'd never been a man to surround himself with a big group of friends (in fact, perish the thought), and it wasn't like he hated being alone sometimes, as in a *normal* amount. Will was as quiet and cautious as ever, even with the fragile hope flickering like a flame reborn in his heart.

Will could use a friend, but he was incredibly choosy, and so trauma-rattled now, to boot. Many people turned him off instantly via his empathy, which gave him a generally accurate idea of what they were thinking and feeling, and a lot of times it wasn't good. Far from it.

He had noticed the solitary fisherman coming down to the same lake where he also liked to fish, about three times a week. The lake was newly thawed and the trout were plentiful, but the man struggled, almost comically. He obviously wasn't a seasoned pro at this, and he wasn't even improving with time, but Will admired the way he never gave up. There was a certain sad, sweet kindness about the man's whole demeanor that caught Will's attention.

Amazingly, the stranger, with his high cheekbones, amber eyes and plush lips, looked a lot like *Hannibal.* Will couldn't imagine what the chances were that he'd come *here,* a million worlds away from the life that nearly destroyed him, and meet a man who could be his nemesis' twin. It was crazy.

But then, maybe, just maybe it meant something. What if Will was supposed to befriend this man, and that would finally absolve and heal what Hannibal had done to him and helped him become?

Oh, he put in the time to make one hundred percent sure this stranger *wasn't* Hannibal, or a relation. There weren't many Lecter men still living at all, and none who were in this age bracket, aside from Hannibal himself. And Hannibal was still locked up in Baltimore. The resemblance, then, was either a coincidence, fate, or both, one of those playful happenstances that tricked you onto the right path in the way you least expected.

And then, once he'd watched the man from a short distance for a while, knowing it wasn't Hannibal, he also knew there had been no need to call Alana or research the Lecter family tree. This man was nothing like Hannibal. It left him open to a wonderful new feeling, and that was a growing fondness for the handsome, solitary stranger in glasses who wouldn't give up on learning to fish.

"Hey," Will greeted quietly, with a friendly smile he rarely gave anyone these days.

He stood on the dock next to the man, and the man looked up, straightened his glasses, and cleared his throat nervously. "Oh. Hello."

Their eyes met, the sun glinting off the man's glasses.

“I’m Will.” He put his hand down as they laughed at their mutual awkwardness.

“Lucas.” And Lucas shook Will’s gloved hand with his own. “I’ve seen you here before. You’re a great fisherman, always a good catch.”

He sighed at his clearly opposite luck, and Will suggested, “Want a hand?”

“That would be fantastic,” Lucas enthused as his face lit up.

Will could see a light fringe of hair peeking out from his knit winter cap, and he wondered if all of Lucas’ hair was blonde like that, or mixed with brown and silver like Hannibal’s.

He gave Lucas a fishing tutorial, impressed by the easy grace with which the man took to each step. Lucas was clearly puzzled by the amount of effort Will put into the lessons, as much as he was impressed by the younger man’s expertise and skill. Will was also patient and gentle, while correcting Lucas’ form and technique as needed, knowing Lucas wasn’t going to turn into an amazing fisherman in a single hour. But it was a nice start, in a few ways.

“You’re totally fine now, see that?” Will grinned. “You never had formal lessons, or went fishing with anyone who could teach you?”

“I don’t have anyone here,” Lucas explained, focusing on the task at hand, but also intently on his conversation with Will. “And the idea of hiring a stranger to teach me was…”

“Terrible,” Will laughed. “I agree, I’d feel the same way. Good thing *we* aren’t strangers anymore, then.”

Lucas blushed a little. His cheeks were already a bit red with cold, so this meant his tanned complexion *really* flamed now.

Will casually taught Lucas another, better way to hold the rod, asking “is this okay?” before he touched his new acquaintance. There were so many layers of clothing between them, it wasn’t much like real contact, anyway.

“Ah, I see!” Lucas cast his line again, watching it arc over the gray water until it landed right where he wanted it. “Thank you so much.”

Will coached him until he caught a large trout, and when he saw Lucas’s innocent delight and pride in the victory, he wanted to hug him. He held back, but the man was nothing if not huggable.

They packed the fish in Will’s cooler with ice, where it would keep while they talked some more.

“So, why’d you decide to take up fishing?” Will asked, sitting down beside Lucas.

“I recently moved here from Denmark,” Lucas explained. “Since arriving, I’ve been alone quite often with nothing much to do. I teach online classes, but beyond that…”

“You’re Danish, then,” Will noted, opening the lunchbox he’d brought. “I noticed your accent a few times before. When you’d curse at the fish.”

Lucas laughed, blushing again, looking right at Will until Will looked back. Then Lucas immediately looked away at the horizon.

“And when you cursed at the fishing equipment,” Will added, chuckling along with Lucas. “And the *lake*…”

“True, they heard an earful from me. But at least trying to teach myself to fish has gotten me out of the house, kept me active. I also took up some other hobbies. I walk a lot. Never had so much time for reading. Without a social life to speak of…”

“Well, this isn’t the town to come to if you’re looking for that,” Will smiled. “Want some coffee? I also brought some lunch…”

“Oh, that’s kind of you, Will. Thank you, yes.”

Lucas said this with the attitude of a man who no one had done anything nice for in ages. Will’s heart sank with an empathetic pang, yet at the same time, the way Lucas said his name was lovely. The sound, and Lucas’ smiles, cut right through the cold day and made him feel warm all over.

“No social opportunities to speak of. Is that why you came here?” Lucas asked, taking a break from fishing to nibble on a turkey sandwich. “I mean, because the population is so small and there’s wide open spaces…hardly anyone around.”

“You caught me.” Will sipped his coffee, nodding with appreciation at the warmth and dark, bitter flavor. “Yes. Definitely. I never knew much about how to relate to other people or fit in, even how to talk to them. I can avoid it all I want out here.”

“But you’re talking to me,” Lucas pointed out.

“Guess you’re just lucky.” Will laughed again, a gentle and sweet sound. He surprised himself with the way his playful words flowed, effortless and irresistible.

“I must be.” Lucas held Will’s gaze a little longer and then looked down at his mostly-eaten sandwich with a tiny, adorable smile.

“I don’t mean to rag on this place, in general. There are plenty of aspects I like. Plain, country living suits me just fine after all I’ve been through.” Will wiped his mouth with a napkin and added, “Trust me, it’s a long story.”

“So is mine. I chose here because it seemed like a quiet place, a place where I could be truly alone.”

“I don’t think anybody wants *that,*” Will winced, “You want that?”

There was no judgment in his tone; actually, it was more like encouragement for Lucas to keep chatting with him. He really wanted to hear what this mysterious, admittedly hunky, shy

man had to say in that soft, exotic voice of his. Those broken eyes, the bashful smile and how he batted those long, light lashes in confusion at Will's attention…Will was feeling pleasantly flustered.

"Are you trying to talk me out of isolation?"

"Very possibly." Will dared to bump their shoulders together, before he could ask himself what the hell he thought he was doing. "Do you fully embrace alone-ness, solitude? I can't… God knows I tried."

"No, you're right." Lucas bumped Will back with a boyish grin, then sat up straight. "That kind of alian….*alian-nation*, alienation?"

"Yeah, that's the word." Will gave him a reassuring smile and Lucas reacted as if he'd handed him a check for a thousand dollars.

"It might be a little too much like death. That's uncomfortable."

"Well, I say, you're too young to die."

Lucas nodded slowly, reflecting on this. "How nice, at my age, to be too young for anything."

"It's rude to ask, but…" Will had no idea how to do this sort of small talk, but winging it was going well so far.

"Oh, that's fine," Lucas smiled, "I'm turning forty-four this year. Can't believe it. What about you?"

"I'll be thirty-five. I assume you haven't done much dating since you've – how long have you been here?"

Lucas finished his sandwich and shook his head solemnly. "A few months. No, not much dating, uh…no dating at all for me, as it happens."

"Hey, not everybody even likes dating. Okay, I need to be more specific, because nobody in their right mind likes the *process* of dating."

He laughed, and Lucas let himself laugh too. Will wanted to nibble on his lips all of a sudden, and from there his thoughts took a fast trip to full-on making out. This man had no idea how attractive he was, and Will wanted to hear him gasp in surprised pleasure. Wanted it badly.

There was no time to bother wondering if it had to do with Hannibal; putting the killer behind him or if he missed Hannibal's face. Those things were there, in one form or another, even if Will didn't know the percentage for each. But he wasn't interested in Lucas for those reasons; they were only details, the facts of his life and scars that nothing could change. Here, today, he was starting something brand new and it was because the man before his eyes thoroughly charmed him, only for being Lucas. He would have been drawn to Lucas, regardless of ever having met Hannibal.

“I just mean, if…intimacy’s not your thing, then that’s…” Will floundered about, worse than the fish when Lucas had pulled it from the hook.

Smooth, real smooth.

“Oh, that’s not it at all,” Lucas rushed to assure him. “I love intimacy. It just seemed like something that I wasn’t meant to have, so I stopped trying. That sounds sad and sort of pathetic, doesn’t it?”

“It sounds relatable. Secret time,” Will confided, “A few weeks ago I went out with this perfect woman.”

Lucas bit his lip in a manner that seemed to Will too fierce and probably painful. His pretty golden-brown eyes flared with an unspoken feeling. *Jealousy?*

“I mean, perfect in the sense that she and I could have been quiet together. She was attractive, good sense of humor, friendly and sweet, even loved dogs just like me. But I guess being quiet together with some stranger sounds a lot to me like ‘alone together.’ I damn sure don’t need that.”

“Alone together is worse than alone by yourself, yes.” Lucas nodded. “Something in you is still too loud for that quiet life?”

“Mmm. Seems that way. A weird surprise, if I’m honest. I thought I had given up, but apparently not. Wonders never cease.”

“So what do you even want to do now, for. I don’t know…socially?” Lucas tugged at his hat and then fidgeted with a loose string hanging from his coat sleeve, anxiety and hope blending in a potent flow of emotion.

Will could take it in using his empathy, but maybe more by using his heart.

“For a long time, one minute to the next seemed like all I really had left to give someone. Uh, someone took everything else away from me. But one day I woke up and decided to take it back. My life, that is. Including being a human who needs other humans around, on occasion. Maybe one human I can find who I would always want around.”

Lucas returned his wistful smile. It faded as he asked, “Someone took everything away from you? It’s funny how they do that, isn’t it?”

“I know, right? Wait. You never read about me in the papers?” Will was surprised, but Lucas was definitely no liar.

“Why? Are you famous?”

“I’m not a movie star or anything,” Will explained.

“Well, you look like you could be.” Lucas gazed at Will, then once again tore his focus away with what seemed like strong effort and self control.

“Hey, that’s sweet. Thank you,” Will smiled. He reached over and softly placed his hand on top of Lucas’s, and their hands were bare this time, from taking gloves off before eating their lunch.

Lucas sucked in a breath, and Will withdrew immediately. “I’m sorry. Am I being too much? Do you not like–”

“You’re not too much.” Lucas blinked back tears, then reached for Will’s hand, taking it in his own with a gentle squeeze.

Their hands were cold, pressed together in shivering solidarity. Lucas’s was larger than Will’s and could easily encompass it.

“I’m the bad kind of famous,” Will confessed in a low tone, almost whispering. They dropped each other’s hands out of confused politeness.

“Not because *you’re* bad,” Lucas said rather insistently. “But now I’m worried about you. I always read just the positive news stories every day; it’s part of how I improved my English skills. If I didn’t read about you, it must have been the type of news I avoid.”

“The scary stuff?” Will sighed. “That’d be me.”

“Scary stuff happens to good people sometimes. It happened to me, you know. Probably obvious from…how I am. You don’t know how long it has been since someone touched me so tenderly, with kindness, in a personal way, like you did. That’s why I reacted…I don’t even know what that was, actually. I stopped reading bad news after becoming bad news myself. But I never meant to be anything but a decent man. That’s how I know for sure, being ‘the bad kind of famous’ doesn’t mean anything about who you really are.”

“It doesn’t, I guess. It says more about what has happened to you, then what you did in response. And a lot of times we don’t have many choices when it comes to that second part.” Will was caught up in Lucas’ shy eyes and was wondering how he had gone without touch for so long, given that he was so damn beautiful and an absolute pleasure to spend time with.

It was one thing to form the theory about Lucas being touch-starved, like himself, and another to have it demonstrated with such intensity.

He felt a thrum of excited pride at being the one to give this pleasure in a human touch back to Lucas. And he wanted to give Lucas back everything he’d lost, all of a sudden.

“It’s been how long since you were mistaken for bad news?” Will asked thoughtfully.

“Two years,” Lucas explained. “I spent about half that time trying to stay in my hometown. But I couldn’t make it work.”

“You shouldn’t have to *make it work*. Nobody should expect that from you, especially after a traumatic experience.” Will shook his head. “I promise, you don’t owe it to anyone and you should never have to *earn* fitting in where you belong, or being cared for.”

“I guess. I don’t know. Anyway, I moved to another city in Denmark first, but it was still too close. Finally, my son went to boarding school and I realized he wasn’t going to be home enough that it was important for me to stay there. We’ll still see each other as much, visits are good. He really wants to see the U.S.”

Will laughed. “I bet. Teenager?”

“And then some,” Lucas affirmed. “Do you have kids?”

“No, I…used to have…not really. Never really. I wanted to, but…” Will shrugged. “I do have seven dogs, so there’s that.”

Lucas’s eyes widened. “Really? That’s great! Could I meet them sometime?”

“You can meet them today, if you want to.” Will was so happy at the prospect, he thought his heart might burst.

“I’d love it.” Lucas got to his feet quickly, maintaining his balance in the fishing gear and winter coat whose bulk seemed to make him uncomfortable.

He had an impressive, natural elegance about him, not like Hannibal’s serene superiority and enigmatic darkness. This was grace, exuding from Lucas in every way. And it comforted Will just as naturally. He had lost sight of the line between comfortable and aroused, a very pleasant type of confusion. Lucas made him feel both in equal measures.

They walked through the woods, balancing the weight of the fishing equipment between them, Lucas keeping pace with Will as if with his long, strong legs it was no effort at all. Will was also amazed that a guy this big and with that clearly powerful physique lived that way, shrinking back from humanity. Letting life beat him down. What the hell happened to this sweet man? Anger simmered in Will, but this wasn’t the time, and he needed to get a handle on his own self control, or this new friendship would end before it could begin in earnest.

“You seem so nice,” Will said, his cheeks turning pink at the way Lucas glanced over at him, the two of them trudging in the remnants of snow clinging to leaves and branches on the forest floor.

Lucas took off his hat and ruffled his hair as the sun peeked through the naked branches overhead to pour gold on a mix of silver, blonde, and a shade of chocolate brown darker than Hannibal’s hair. The strands of alternating, beautiful colors were soft and infinitely touchable, hanging a bit overlong, one smooth lock doing its best to cover his forehead and even his eye.

It was damn cute, and wow…Lucas made it work. He looked so gorgeous, it was startling, and his hat-mussed hair was a treasure to Will.

Bit by bit, Lucas was shedding layers of defenses and resistance to human contact, and Will felt elated to be the reason.

He couldn’t wait to see more of Lucas, and did not chase that thought tangent further, knowing where it would go. Too fast, too soon for such ideas. But there they were, nestled in

his mind just waiting to be unfurled in sweet fantasies. Maybe later, when he was alone again, to help him feel his loneliness less. It was going to hit him like an anvil after this enchanting afternoon…but Will was not going to make a move and risk scaring Lucas off. It would be ridiculous and could ruin everything, so he was. Not going to do that. At all.

“I mean, you seem so nice for someone with a bad reputation,” Will clarified.

“Yes, that’s what I said, too! Back when my troubles began.” Lucas barked a cynical laugh, and Will somehow doubted there were too many things that made him cynical. But they all resided back home in that little, suffocating Danish town. “And I was talking to people I’d known since I was a boy. I tried to tell them what they should have known. I’m harmless. I don’t want to hurt anyone. Too busy getting hurt and letting people down, but…in the end I don’t know who was hurt most.”

“You.” Will led him through the clearing in front of his cozy, rustic little house with its blue shutters and door. A cheerful “hello” sort of a place, Will always thought. But he’d never brought anyone *home* with him to this house before now.

He paused on the front walk and gave Lucas an incisive look. “You were falsely accused? I was, too, and I don’t mean to keep prying. Just wanted to tell you that it wasn’t your fault, and if they tore your life apart, you suffered more than they could ever understand. Because they don’t know what trust is.”

Lucas nodded, shifting his grip on the bag of gear, its strap slung over one shoulder as if it was much lighter than Will knew it to be. “They don’t know anything about it, but I certainly did. What a mess it was.”

“You don’t have to talk about it any more if you don’t want to,” Will said, smiling in an attempt to make up for his unintended pushiness.

“Not yet, at least,” Lucas said, looking relieved. “The details are…”

“Yeah. I understand. C’mon, let me introduce you to my family.”

***

“*There's a certain point the body can't come back from*
In one year, we've learned the turn of the mouth
The depth that the chest cavity takes
But I can't say I'd run when things get hard
It's just that I don't trust myself with my heart
But I've had to let it break a little more
'Cause they say that's what it's for
That's how the light shines in
That's how the light shines in
That's how the light gets in.” -Lana Del Rey

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Lucas lingered in the front door-frame, wondering when Will was going to lead the dogs out to the porch so he could meet them.

“What are you doing out there? It’s freezing.” Will beckoned with his hand and that sensuous voice of his, making Lucas’s heart beat even faster.

His heart had been having a little panic party of some kind ever since the handsome young man had approached him on the dock, and if he didn’t catch up with it soon, he was slightly concerned he might faint.

“Come on in, Lucas.” Will wasn’t looking at him now, but rather he was leaning down in the front room, which was set up as a little tv den, with couches and a wood-burning stove, bookcases and framed paintings of rural scenery on the sage-colored walls.

He was tending to his dogs, who were greeting him with an excited, drooling neediness that Lucas had no problem relating to. Will assumed Lucas was coming inside, as if it was not even a matter of inviting, but of expecting it. Lucas could not accept the idea that his being welcome in someone else’s house was a foregone conclusion, not without being sure.

“I just thought…because I’m a stranger, and I even admitted about my past problems…I know how that sounds.” Lucas came inside, his voice sheepish even as his heart leapt with joy to be between the walls of Will’s house, in Will’s own private world. “I assumed you would prefer that I stay in the yard while you brought the dogs out.”

It was so warm and pleasant here, Lucas could imagine feeling safe again, just for a handful of seconds.

“You assumed that I’d let you shiver out there and insult you by suggesting you’re dangerous or unwelcome in my home?” Will looked at him incredulously, patting the head of a medium-sized dog whose collar tag said “Winston.”

“I’m sorry,” Lucas sighed, hating himself all over again. “I’m so damned awkward. I still have this instinct of making those assumptions. I can see how it was offensive of me to think that about you.”

“No, it most certainly was not,” Will insisted gently.

Lucas noticed a few details belatedly, some more arresting than others. He’d been so caught up in confusion, embarrassment and regret that this was his first clear moment of seeing Will without his big winter coat on. Of course, he also noticed each of the endearing dogs more clearly, but that wasn’t what held his attention the most.

Will was handsome enough all bundled up; no hat, scarf or heavy outerwear could hide those vivid blue eyes or that angelic mouth. His sexy voice and kind, slightly flirtatious manner had bewitched Lucas immediately, while Will’s intelligence, sensitivity and understanding had deepened the feeling. Now, he was treated to a view of a fully clothed man with the sensation of seeing Will naked. The idea of *actually* seeing Will naked was…too much… much more than Lucas could handle at the moment.

His neighbor wore simple clothes, including a soft flannel shirt in faded shades of dove gray and cranberry red that was going maroon over time and countless washings. The shirt didn't obscure the fact of Will's gorgeous body, which was slender but strong. A neck so beautiful, Lucas thought he'd only seen such a thing on marble statues representing male perfection. Will had broad shoulders and a comparatively small waist, and Lucas could make out the tell-tale firmness of toned muscles all over. This stunning man was better than in good shape; he was in fighting shape. His jeans were well-fitting, showing his trim figure and nice legs.

And Lucas was…fine. He would be *fine*. He was almost sure of it. His palms were sweating and a nervous headache was pulsing in his temples, and being here meant so much that it scared him. But he could do this.

What a simple thing to get so obsessed over, he chided himself. *Don't be stupid. Just a probably-brief little visit to a neighbor's house to play with the dogs.* But Lucas knew that was far from the only reason Will had invited him.

Lucas stared at those hauntingly beautiful blue eyes and the soft, smooth alabaster skin with rosy cheeks, at the smile Will gave his dogs, which was absolutely heart-melting. He felt as if Will might be a winter mirage.

Meanwhile, Will realized he was still wearing his knit hat and pulled it off with an absent-minded chuckle, more focused on Lucas. "Oops. Don't need that in here."

Will had casually revealed his healthy and thick, curly brown hair, which he swept out of his eyes with a swipe of his hand that looked habitual. What ravishing, lovely natural curls, the dark shade so stunning against Will's pale skin. Then Lucas noticed a scar on his new friend's forehead and his eyes widened in concern.

"Oh. This is just a souvenir from my bad news era." Will pointed to the dark pink line on his smooth brow. It looked so angry, like a tattoo of someone else's wrathfully eternal claim on him.

Lucas' blood ran cold. "Who did that to you?" He knew instinctively it wasn't a cut from some accident, and Will didn't bother pretending otherwise.

"It doesn't matter." Will shook his head. "Now get your butt over here already, close the door before the foxes start coming in."

He gave Lucas an adorably expectant, almost spousal look, as if Lucas was not only welcome, but Will was tired of waiting for him. Almost like Will had already been waiting too long for Lucas to come into his life. But how could *that* be?

Lucas burst into startled action, shutting the door, wiping his boots on the mat and politely leaving them there rather than tracking water and dirt in.

"I'm sorry," Lucas said yet again, feeling the warmth in his own face as he blushed for perhaps the hundredth time since meeting Will.

He hung his coat on the rack beside Will's and tried to ignore the domestic twinge in his heart. Their coats, scarves and hats looked just right, side by side.

"I know." Will had been leaning over the dogs, but now he stood up straight, holding a small, feisty, but loving dog in his arms as he walked over to Lucas. "Could you stop, though? And while you're at it, have a seat and warm up."

Lucas didn't know if he was currently struggling more to believe he'd made a new friend, or that Will's extraordinary good looks were real, or Will's kindness and hospitality, for that matter. But in any case, he was way out of his depths, without minding. Not at all. It seemed okay to be in over his head, for once.

"This is Buster," Will said, and he sat on the floor beside the dark green armchair which Lucas had selected.

Will held the frisky little mutt up for Lucas' better acquaintance.

"Awww," Lucas grinned, "He's adorable. Hello, Buster, I'm so pleased to meet you." He shook the dog's tiny paw, rewarded afterwards by a friendly bark.

"Yes, Buster, Lucas complimented you. You're gonna love him, huh?" Will set the dog down and laughed to Lucas, "That little guy's got the biggest ego of the whole bunch. He's a tough one, though. And here's Winston, Zoe…"

Will continued with the careful and specific introductions, making it clear that each pet was special and recognized for their personalities and charms.

Lucas could not have been happier. He missed his dog, Fanny, so much since she'd died, and he never got to play with dogs anymore…until now. Soon, he sank onto the rug without another thought, letting the smaller dogs climb onto his lap. All of the dogs nuzzled their heads into him, seeking more stroking pets and scratches behind the ears, and even showing off tricks.

"Lucas, this is everyone," Will said with a quiet, heartfelt tenderness. He gazed at his new acquaintance. Lucas was genuinely delighted to be surrounded by dogs who were this hyper (except Winston, who remained calm, but welcoming). "Everyone, this is Lucas."

Lucas paused in the act of petting two dogs at once while another few milled around him, sniffing and seeking more attention. Zoe was doing her little diva routine, sitting down, lying down, offering her paw. Doing the whole series of tricks again. Finally, Lucas laughed brightly and asked if Will had any doggie treats.

"We can't let a performance like this go unrewarded," Lucas chuckled. He beamed as he gave out the small treats.

Lucas was distinctly aware of how intently Will watched him. And it seemed to be making him *glow.*

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“You’re staying for dinner, right?” Will asked when they took the dogs outside for a short bit of fresh air and exercise. “We have that beautiful fish, after all.”

Lucas shook his head as his cheeks turned dark pink. “You don’t have to do that, Will. You’ve done so much, and plus, you already shared your lunch.”

Will rolled his eyes with what could easily be read as fast-growing affection. Lucas felt as if they’d already known each other for years.

Coming closer, as the afternoon softly fell into evening in a drifting, lazy twilight blur of lavender, peach and pink, Will clasped Lucas’ face in one hand and spoke firmly.

“Wanna know another secret? A bigger one. That was the *third time* I packed an extra sandwich, hoping you’d be down at the lake so I could introduce myself and offer to share. The first time, I chickened out. The next time, you weren’t there. But today has been a real miracle.”

“*You’re* a miracle.” Lucas couldn’t bear the sweet, purely caring way Will handled him. He felt so completely vulnerable and exposed, afraid to believe this could be as safe a place to fall as it seemed.

“I’m no such thing. I just like you a lot is all.” Will stroked with his thumb, tracing Lucas’ jaw. “And I don’t *have* to do a damn thing, so if I offer you an invitation, you’ll know it’s a sincere one. Okay?”

“Why would you go to so much trouble just for me?” Lucas prayed that he wasn’t really going to start *crying.*

God hadn’t come through for him in years, but maybe this was the moment that started to turn around?

Will stepped back, leveled him with a sharply admiring gaze, and at the same time whistled to the dogs and patted his leg. “Come on, guys, back inside for dinner.”

The dogs immediately trotted over to the door with devoted obedience, and Will opened it. He glanced back at Lucas with a teasing smile, speaking in a theatrical “dad talking to the kids” voice.

“What’s *that,* guys? Is Uncle Lucas going to stay for dinner? Well, I don’t knooowwww….*is* he?”

Lucas breathed out a genuinely tickled and delighted laugh that puffed visibly in the chilly air.

“Yes, he is.”

Evening shadows were descending in the woodsy nook which Will had made home, but he felt a light glowing inside him, that flame Will lit. It was more than hope, it was a growing certainty, maybe the beginning of trust.

If he could stop thinking about kissing Will and holding him in his arms, he might have an easier time understanding those feelings.

Right now, the only thing he knew for certain was that it was finally time to come in from the cold.

kintsugi

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Where did you come from? You’re so perfect, so deliciously perfect.”
Elliot, *Dead Ringers* (2023)

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The dinner was just like their lunch, except that cold air and confused excitement had slowly evolved into natural chemistry. The whole house was warm, toasty and welcoming, or maybe that was just Will’s presence influencing his space, Lucas reflected. The wood stove added a nice scent of smoky cedar, and Will’s small dining area was pleasant with its shades of pine green and walnut. The dogs were dozing in the next room, and Will had tuned the countertop radio of the eat-in kitchen to a soft, folky station.

Will had set the table using some mismatched, pretty vintage plates he’d put together from nearby thrift shops. “That’s about all there is for a good…thirty country miles around here,” he’d explained, “‘Cept for a couple of old man bars, one rickety gas station that seems to be stolen from the beginning scene of a horror movie – telling you it’s a good idea to leave and not go into those woods…”

Lucas laughed into his glass of cabernet, his cheeks going pink. He managed a small sip of smooth red wine and even to set the glass back down on the green tablecloth without spilling a drop.

Will’s glasses almost slid off as he leaned over the fish he was cutting into portions for each of them, because he was busy looking at Lucas and smiling. He’d frozen for a few beats with the knife halfway through the baked trout. Lucas glanced back at him as Will touched the center of the glasses, pushing the brown frames back into place. When Will winked at him, Lucas grinned, looking away again, totally overwhelmed and delighted.

“There’s the general store,” Lucas added, flustered. “Um, but I think that’s it, yes. I order almost everything online.”

“Well, of course. I don’t go inside anywhere to purchase a damn thing. That’s a fool’s game,” Will chuckled. “I’m so glad we’re both shy and…a little quirky. You get this stuff.”

“Yes. Nothing worse in the whole entire world than a crowded grocery store.” Lucas relaxed into the conversation. “It’s true, nobody ever understands. *‘Don’t be such a loner, Lucas. No one’s out to get you.*’”

“Ha! Au contraire,” Will said, shaking his head with a sharp laugh.

He put a sage green plate with a pattern of frontier travelers in covered wagons in front of Lucas. “There we go.”

Lucas stared at the carefully arranged, lovely meal. The baked trout was still steaming, slightly blackened on the outside, soft and juicy inside, with several slices of lemon on top, artfully arranged. Will had insisted on doing it all himself, would not let Lucas do so much as set the table. He'd also said that the meal was easy, simple, and no trouble at all.

"You said this was a simple, easy meal," Lucas said, embarrassed that the expertly cooked fresh fish, with fanned-out scalloped potatoes and steamed, garlicky green beans made him so close to crying. "I didn't want you to work hard. Hope this is what you wanted to have and not…"

"Lucas." Will sighed.

He had planned to sit across from his guest, but now he shifted one seat over to the head of the table, closer to Lucas. Gently, he put a hand on Lucas' knee and squeezed, then patted it before letting go in a polite, friendly way.

"I wanted to make this for you, and for you to have the best meal I can make. My baked Mac n Cheese is pretty good, too. It has breadcrumbs on it." His blue eyes sparkled in the quiet, flickering glow of two candles he'd used as an impromptu centerpiece.

"Sounds delicious," Lucas smiled, tugging his ear and then tucking his wayward hair behind it.

"Then I'll make it for you soon. How does that sound?" A nurturing, affectionate tone in his voice made Lucas tremble all over.

"Perfect. Thank you, Will. It means more to me than I…" He felt inconveniently torn between a sobbing break-down and begging to be held, or calming himself so he could continue the quasi-maybe first date in a way that Will deserved.

"Okay, darlin.'" Will nodded, pouring his own wine and topping Lucas' glass off. "That's okay by me. I hope you can get used to someone being nice to you and even…spoilin' you a bit."

Lucas stared at his dinner companion, struggling not to do so with his mouth hanging open in shock.

He loved the way Will's voice shifted to a sweetly lazy, sincere drawl when he was enjoying himself, feeling relaxed and comfortable.

He loved that he made Will feel like that.

Most of all, he liked Will calling him 'darlin.'

His ex-wife had never called him by a single pet name, and after a couple of years wore out her feelings or regard for him, she had not even bothered with 'Lucas.' More like 'Hey You," and only when there was housework, a bill to pay or an errand to run.

"I only wish there was something I could do for you," he said, honestly, tentatively. He cut into his food as if he thought it was too precious to eat, and he almost did.

“Keep me company,” Will answered mildly. “If you want to, and only if you want to. You don’t owe me anything.”

“It’s not about that.” Lucas pressed his lips together, searching for words, absent-mindedly wondering if his usual button-up and sweater combination looked alright.

He didn’t wake up that morning thinking anything extraordinary was going to happen, so he was dressed like plain old Lucas.

“I just…like having you as my friend,” he said, trying to put words to his feelings. The more he reached for clarity, it seemed to roll away from him like a spool of yarn.

He ate another bite of potatoes, considering. “I know it’s been less than a day, but I’m trying to explain that…I would love to do something really nice for you. Not for gratitude. For you.”

“You’re sweet, Lucas,” Will blushed, looking gorgeous. “Thank you.”

***

They took a last glass of wine with them to the cozy living room and sat together on the couch when they could have sat in separate chairs.

Will stared at the woodstove and Lucas stared at the tranquil, sleeping dogs. Lucas cleared his throat and fluttered his fingers on his knees. Will licked his lips and set his wine glass aside. Lucas did that, too, mirroring him. And just the same way, when Will turned to face him, he turned, too.

“I want to tell you something, but I want you to know it’s up to you how you would like our friendship to progress.” Will’s brow furrowed and he frowned. “That sounds weird. I feel awkward.”

“Don’t,” Lucas smiled, moving a little closer. “That’s my job.”

“I want you to feel comfortable here with me.” Will reached out and softly ran just the very tips of his fingers through the fringe of blond and silver hair that touched Lucas’ brow. “And in the interest of honesty, I have to tell you that I’m…very attracted to you.”

Lucas turned scarlet and gaped at him; Will cleared his throat.

“Well, that’s out,” Will said, and immediately downed the rest of his wine. “I’m sorry,” he said after swallowing the last fortifying sip. “And so mortified. Don’t know what came over me.”

“You were being honest, what’s wrong with that?” Lucas shifted forward again so that their knees lightly touched.

“I don’t know. I don’t do this, see, I…I would normally let the other person lead in this situation but with you, I get this amazing feeling of confidence. It makes me all…flirty and forward.”

“Really?” Lucas grinned, elated, and had to look down again, staring at their knees, pressed gently together.

“Yeah. But regardless, we can just be friends, or friendly acquaintances. Or hell, if I made you uncomfortable in any way, you can leave and I won’t bother you again.”

“But Will, I don’t understand,” Lucas said, gathering the nerve to search Will’s eyes. He found them shining with admiration as Will fidgeted nervously.

“Okay, that’s totally…I get it. Somehow I became Mr. Moving Too Fast. *Me!* The guy who hasn’t had a date in…it’s too depressing to recall.” Will put his head in his hand, then raked his fingers through his curls.

“No, you aren’t moving too fast,” Lucas clarified, placing his hand on Will’s knee to emphasize the point. “I don’t know what is ‘acquaintance.’”

“Oh!” Will laughed adorably, ducking his head, rubbing his stubbled chin. “An acquaintance is someone you vaguely know and see around sometimes, but you’re not really friends with them. Are you sure I wasn’t totally pushy and presumptuous? I like you so much. I don't want to push you away.”

Lucas sighed, “I like you, too. Can’t I stay, please?”

Will’s eyes widened. He took Lucas’ hand in his and just held it warmly for a few moments. “Of course. I want you to stay, Lucas, really badly.”

Unused to anything remotely in the vicinity of such words, Lucas was at a loss, transfixed by the wonderful room in the safe, remote cabin, all locked up inside with just Will and the dogs for company. The woodsy scent, the flames crackling, red wine boosting his own courage just a bit. Everything felt absolutely right.

“Why?” he asked, a last attempt to clarify before he would open up as well. He had to make sure he didn’t come on too strong. What if he had misunderstood Will? What were the chances that someone like Will–

“Because you’re special.” Will blushed again, but held Lucas’ gaze. “And you have a beautiful heart. Plus, you’re drop dead gorgeous, even if you act like you don’t know it.”

“That’s how I feel about you,” said Lucas eagerly, clasping Will’s face, his thumb rubbing over the younger man’s jawline. He felt the bristly softness of Will’s beard and the heat of his skin. “That’s why I don’t want… acquaintance with you.”

He closed the distance between them, lifting his other hand so he framed Will’s face in both. And he brushed his lips sweetly, sensuously to Will’s, kissing him slowly, attentively.

The world seemed to stand still, giving them time to learn each other, all the time they wanted. Lucas wished he could have this day and night instead of any other day and night that lay ahead – just this one, over and over. Meeting Will, sitting on the dock, learning to

fish, sharing a fantastic meal and getting to know one another. How often did one meet another person who truly longed to know all about you?

In the worst days back home, none of the townspeople remembered that Lucas had a beautiful heart.

Will's lips were warm and soft, pliant to Lucas as he caressed the younger man's face, then gently played with his silky curls. With a smile that pressed to Will's mouth as one slow-burning kiss led to the next, Lucas realized that Will was wearing vanilla chapstick. As if he'd been hoping that kissing would occur tonight.

Their kiss was feathery and sweet with red wine, vanilla and anxious over-excitement. Both trembling, they drew back slightly, pressing their foreheads together.

"Holy shit, you kissed me," Will said, breathing out shakily.

"Yes, well, I can take a hint….eventually." They laughed, fingers stroking each other's faces, lips hovering on the verge of another kiss.

The best part was knowing they could take their time; they could tease, draw it out. This was all theirs, as long as they wanted it. No emergency or inevitable, horrible interruption from the drearily predictable sadness of the outside world was going to push them apart.

"I thought maybe this was choice number three," Lucas said, eyes half-closed as his voice deepened.

He felt the shiver that went through Will as it caused warm, delighted lust to pool hotly in his stomach, stiffening his cock.

Will was staring into his eyes at incredibly close range, finding flecks of cinnamon brown and pure gold. "I might have forgotten to mention the third choice, but I did imply it…"

They chuckled; Lucas moved his lips closer to Will's, angling to take what he wanted, deliberately making Will want it even more by waiting.

"Friendship," he continued, kissing the corner of Will's lips as his heart pounded. "That 'acquaintance' bullshit" He kissed another quick giggle from Will's mouth, "…or…."

Lucas lightly bit down on Will's lower lip, tugging just a little, drawing a gasp from the younger man.

"Oh, God," Will sighed, licking into Lucas' mouth as the older man instantly opened to him. "Mmm…" He got lost in the lazily blissful slide of their hot tongues, not even realizing he was clutching at Lucas' sweater with both hands until his knuckles went white.

"Fuck!" He whispered needily. "You feel so good, Lucas."

Lucas looked at him with hazy eyes, dizzy with lust. "You, too."

He started unbuttoning Will's shirt as growing urgency began to overwhelm their attempt to take their time enjoying the first taste of intimacy. They kept kissing, exchanging licks and nibbles, and Lucas peeled Will's shirt off, his lips immediately back on Will's. His shaky hands landed on the warm, smooth skin of Will's chest, coasting over firm pecs and letting his thumbs barely graze already firm nipples. The rosy nubs went harder with just a touch from Lucas, as Will groaned and the kiss got messier, wetter, full of barely controlled impatience.

It was somewhat of a blur, but it seemed that as Will tugged off Lucas' sweater and got started on his shirt, they were still kissing, and also getting up from the couch so that Will could confusedly lead them towards the bedroom.

Although they fumbled like lovedrunk teenagers, they had stopped laughing at the small awkward flusters or misdirected bumps, making a swift path to the bedroom. Their happiness was fully present, only getting stronger, but they were so infused with the desire for skin on skin and to taste each other in every private, sensitive place that they took it very seriously all of a sudden.

Will backed right into a wall in the hallway leading to the bedroom, and Lucas kissed the gasp of small pain from his lips, busily working the younger man's jeans open. As Will thrust his tongue hard against Lucas, trying to taste as much of his mouth as might be humanly possible, he undid Lucas' belt.

The quiet clunk of the buckle coming undone seemed louder in the thick peace that surrounded their heady kisses and touches that grew greedier by the second.

It was such a specifically sinful, provocative sound, for Will to unbuckle a man's belt because he wanted that man's cock, and badly – just the noise, married to a low moan from Lucas, made Will so hard he pulled on Lucas' hair and bit the older man's lip more firmly.

"So good," Lucas said, a reply to a compliment he'd already affirmed a few minutes ago in a blur of lips, tongue, teeth and hands.

He was already obsessed with Will's body, particularly the dark pink, very sensitive nipples, but then there was the long, slender line of Will's back. And there were those strong arms with big, firm biceps, wrapped right around Lucas, and Will's ravenous lips, his perfect tongue –

"Will, you feel amazing…*Jeg vil have dig så meget*…."

"That sounds awfully pretty." Will's voice was thick with desire; he shoved Lucas' pants down as Lucas did the same to his jeans.

They stepped distractedly out of their trousers, kissing again, Lucas kicking his pants off and slamming Will against the wall, pressing so tightly against his lover that he could suddenly feel the hot, hard lines of their mutual erections touching. Nothing but the thin cotton of two pairs of similar, simple boxers between them.

“It means, I want you so much,” Lucas added, neither of them minding when their glasses clinked together with a slightly uncomfortable bump to both noses. “We feel just right…”

“Yeah, I know,” Will answered huskily. “Feels like I’m dreaming.”

Lucas nodded, then gave him a particularly naughtier smile that seemed much more erotic because of his usual shyness. “That the bedroom, *skat?*”

“Mmmhmm,” Will answered.

Lucas picked him right off the ground, making Will gasp and then immediately wrap around him like a spider monkey, kissing the older man’s lips with even more needy fervor as he was quickly carried to bed.

In the dim room, which was decorated in blue gray with a nautical theme, Lucas affectionately tossed Will down on the bed, so that the younger man bounced slightly on the mattress, grinning like a happy little wolf and reaching for him again.

Lucas poured his body over Will’s and kissed his mouth, then trailed more hot kisses all over Will’s cheeks, jaws, ears, licking and tugging those a little with his sharp teeth like fangs. He kissed Will’s neck, lapping and nibbling at the pale, beautiful skin that revealed more secret, intimate beauty with every single new, precious place Lucas drank in with longing eyes and tasted with the sense that his hunger was endless.

Will lay still for a moment, eyes closed as he put his head back on the pillow and moaned, overwhelmed by the pleasure of Lucas’ mouth on more of his sensitive, touch-starved skin. His fingers were threaded in Lucas’ hair, tightening when Lucas bit him a little harder.

God. For all his bashfulness and purity of heart, Lucas knew what he was fucking doing. He read Will like a book, noticing what Will liked best by the louder gasps and moans he was rewarded with when he got a bit rougher.

Like it was a totally normal thought in the river of his mind, Will realized that Lucas’ bites and tight grabs on his body were designed for pleasure they both felt with unbearable heat – and yet Lucas was in control of it. He’d always pictured it a little different with Hannibal, imagining that Lecter would not be able to control himself, that his cannibal side and his violence would come out in sex, bringing danger and the knife’s edge of some ruthless savagery. A brutal passion Will had worked exhaustively not to want anymore. Not even to think of.

Yet now that he did think about it, he realized it was because he enjoyed and adored Lucas’ lovemaking in an entirely equal and rapturous manner to anything he’d ever anticipated feeling with Hannibal, even in his wildest and bloodiest, delirious nightmares.

And it was only now, with this simple but powerful new understanding, that Will remembered he had to say something about the Hannibal thing. He wasn’t going to lie about one damn thing with Lucas, not ever. There was no goddamn way he’d poison the well of this perfect romance before it even began.

He liked to think maybe, despite all his other fucked-up mistakes and problems, even the flaws etched too deep on his skin and scratched onto his bones to ever shake off, he had learned from his past errors. Maybe he was even ready for a real relationship. He felt so grown-up, lying in his previously lonely, solitary bed with this wonderfully real, gorgeous man on top of him, eating him alive only in metaphor. This was no fantasy; maybe Will could have the real thing, after all.

Questioning just as quickly if he even deserved it, he gently grasped Lucas' face in both hands and murmured, "I have to tell you something before we…keep going…"

Lucas' lips were beestung with too many scrumptious, perfect kisses, and his glasses were a little crooked. Will smiled and carefully removed the glasses, setting them lovingly on the side table.

"Okay," Lucas smiled back. He stroked Will's now thoroughly mussed curls.

"You look a lot like my…sort of my ex," Will said, then winced. "I didn't want to not tell you that. It felt like a lie."

Lucas didn't look particularly bothered. Rather sensibly, though arousal had him breathing hard, he asked, "Do you want me because I remind you of him? Is that why you approached me?"

"Hell, no. At first I thought I oughta stay away from you, because your features reminded me of him. But then I saw more of you whenever I went down to the lake to fish. And I realized, not only were you nothing like him, but I couldn't stay away. Because I liked you so much… you had a magnetic pull on me, and the way you are, the way you make me feel, could not be more polar opposite from the toxic disaster of knowing that other guy. Does that make sense?"

"Yes. Thank you for telling me that, *allerkæreste*. I understand. I'm sure most people have, uh, I think you say, a type?"

"Maybe. But you're you, and that's who I want right now, right here. I want you so much it feels like there aren't words in either language."

"Then you can have me," Lucas said with another genuine, heart-breakingly sweet smile. "I guess I'll take this moment of honest confession to tell you…uhhh…you'll have to help me a little soon. I've never been with another man. You have?"

Will nodded, intrigued and turned on to be Lucas' "first." An exultant, possessive feeling of pride shot through him, increasing an already excruciating level of horniness.

"Not him, though. It was a really long time ago. But I can take care of you, darlin.' I remember the basics, and…handsome and sexy as you are, that'll ensure I'll be a dedicated teacher for you."

"What's up with all the teaching, Mr. Graham?" Lucas smiled, recalling Will's last name from their dinner conversation. He'd forgotten it and remembered it again with a slight effort.

And it felt sort of…exquisitely nervy, dirty and glorious to be making love this soon after meeting.

“That’s *Professor Graham* to you,” Will corrected playfully. “I used to teach, uh, graduate level courses, so I’ll just put that hat back on.”

“Professor, *puttemus?* It suits you.” Fondly, Lucas bopped Will’s nose, as if the younger man was the most adorable thing he’d ever seen.

“*Skat…aller-cast-something…puttemus*…are you going to use every Danish pet name on me, handsome? Knowin’ they’re pretty as all fuck but I don’t know what they mean…”

“*Ohhh,*” Lucas said, his eyes darkening as playful flirting turned to deeper mischief. "Let me explain."

He slid down and pressed his lips to the other side of Will’s long, swan-like neck, deciding that he absolutely must kiss and bite it as many times as he’d done the first side.

“*Skat* is to say…hmm, treasure…honey…sweetie…” He loved how Will turned his chin up and to the side slightly to give maximum access to his neck. Trusting and so beautifully needy…

Each pet name and translation was murmured against Will’s increasingly wet and bite-marked skin, making him tremble, clinging to Lucas’ broad shoulder with a squeeze, trying to stand the tension when it was all he needed, it was that much harder to take without disintegrating.

He moaned, “I’ve never been anyone’s treasure before…more like, *'it’s you again, or oh, no, it’s that guy…*'”

“Me, too,” Lucas said. But it was almost impossible for him to believe anyone could see Will that way. Will was *other-wordly* beautiful. He was so kind, sweet and brilliant, and he was caring, deeply caring. All of that came from a darkness and an intensity Lucas could see clearly and never fear. It was all Will.

Lucas got the sudden premonition that far from needing to fear that unspoken darkness in Will, it was anyone who had ever, or *would* ever hurt Lucas that should be very afraid. Even *that* thought heightened his arousal past the fever pitch it had already reached and tipped over.

“Well, you’re *my* treasure,” Will smiled, basking in the glow of the excessive kisses and nibbles. “Jesus, your mouth should be illegal, you’re killing me…”

“I do know that *some* things are the same regardless of gender,” Lucas laughed tenderly. “This is barely foreplay, *puttemus*. Do you know half the things I plan to do to you with my mouth?”

“Lucas!” Will gasped, “Why are you so perfect? Your mouth, your words, your teeth. Your *body*, oh, Christ…”

He ran both hands over the sides of Lucas' torso, where he found hard muscle and a cute, sexy softness in his lover's low belly. "*Perfect*. The word simply can't be overstated… *puttemus*…"

"Haha," Lucas chuckled, pausing as he kissed Will's neck where it met his shoulder, "You're '*puttemus,*' not me. It means my little cuddly, cute mouse."

"*What?*" Will giggled. "Lucas. I'm in my thirties. I do work out you know…"

"Oh. I *know*. Believe me. I've noticed…"

"*Fucccckkk,*" Will groaned in a long exhale as Lucas kissed his naked shoulders over and over.

"Mmm, yes, *puttemus*. I'd love to fuck you senseless."

He loved how Will's breath caught at the collision of cute pet name and raunchy, dirty talk.

"Then I think you'd really better," Will panted, running his hands down Lucas' back again, this time giving his round, sexy ass an appreciative squeeze. "Before I die right here, cause of death your dirty talk and the way you're tormenting every inch of me with those sweet kisses of yours…plus, the *not* sweet stuff…oh, Lucas, yes, yes…"

His teasing words once again faded even from his memory as Lucas bit down on his shoulder. The older man stroked his wandering, memorizing fingers all the way down Will's obligingly stretched neck to the slope of his shoulder, then began retracing the path with intent fascination.

On the way, though, he ran into the old knife scar from New Orleans. "Aw, Will," he sighed. "Poor *skat,* what happened?"

Will blushed, automatically surprised by the solicitude. Imagine, a man who was *concerned* about Will's scars rather than either wishing he'd given them himself, or triumphing over the ones he had bestowed. Unlike some *other* people. *Never mind that.*

"Used to be a cop down in 'Nawlins," Will drawled, too lost in pleasure and lust to worry much about anything, even references to his patchy history. "I got stabbed. I stopped bein' a cop after that, but honey? I guess I'll warn you that I have...more scars. Hope you don't mind."

"Never," Lucas said softly, and he leaned up, pressing a soft kiss to the red line on Will's forehead. "I don't mind. They're beautiful, just like you. They tell me a story about someone who's gone through terrible troubles and come out stronger. You're brave and you're a survivor. It's written right here on your skin…it makes you even sexier for me."

"Oh, Lucas…why are you so good to me?" Will felt overwhelmed. He bit his lip and felt even more overwhelmed because he could still taste Lucas' passionate kisses.

"Because of who you are to me, of course. *Allerkæreste,* which means dearest." Lucas devoured Will's lips with more kisses, his hands diving deeper into soft curls, controlling Will so he could dominate the kiss, holding the younger man where he wanted him.

“And you thought *you* were moving too fast,” Lucas sighed. “It would help if you could try being less beautiful. Any chance?”

“Why don’t you try that?” Will grinned. “C’mere, roll over.”

Lucas did so with that same easy grace he always had, except when socializing or fishing. He held Will on top of him, discovering that along with the wonderfully pleasant weight of his lover against his larger body, he could feel their cocks nudged together through their underwear – more immediately this time.

“Will,” Lucas gasped, “*Fuck*…oh, that feels so good…”

Will found that the switch of his affections flipped all too easily to pure mischief when Lucas was so adorably overcome with realizations that were all about sex with a man for the very first time.

Proud, even haughty with the importance of getting to be this once-in-a-lifetime lover for Lucas, he laced their fingers together and kissed the older man hard while rolling his hips to grind his rock hard dick down on Lucas’. But Will bit off more than he could chew, even as Lucas started hectically moaning into his mouth, shocked at the new thrills of pleasure.

“Goddamn, darlin’...you’re *huge,*” Will marveled, his face going from pink to red. “I just *assumed* you were, well….we Americans might say ‘packin.’ But *you’re*…oh, God… Lucas…”

“Will, I swear, I could come in a few minutes of you doing that,” Lucas said tightly. Sweat dripped from his brow, breaking out all over his tanned skin. “I never felt something so good…oh, *jeg har brug for dig*….”

I need you...

“Mmm, that’s right, that’s it, *yeah,* baby…” Will frotted against him a few more times, enjoying the uncomfortably clothed friction more than he should, considering how hard he was and how long they’d been spending on “barely foreplay.” Lucas was learning how to hold onto Will as they made out like it was the first time they had kissed, and he ground his own hips up, sliding his immense cock right up against Will’s.

Lightning shot down Will’s spine as he was acutely aware he was dripping enough precum to make the front of his boxers all wet. But he could hardly be self-conscious about that when… damn, Lucas was even *wetter* for him.

“Okay, so you can’t come yet,” Will said with a pained smile, grimacing in deprivation when he stopped grinding, tightening his grip on Lucas’ hands to ease the hungry twinge. “We’ve got so many more things to try, you know.”

Lucas shivered, despite the fire Will felt all over his divine body. Their sweaty, hard forms were so well fitted together, muscles tensed, blissful, painful pleasure driving them both insane. Will could only imagine what actually *fucking* would be like.

“So…” Will paid Lucas back for all those delightful neck kisses, rewarded not only by the splendid taste of Lucas' beautiful, golden skin as he left teeth marks and sucking bruises of his own, but also by the sweetly overpowered, gasping moans of his lover. “Was this a sudden revelation for you today, or, did you know that you might have a fluid orientation? You’ve only mentioned, just briefly, that you were married to a woman…dated another woman afterwards…”

Will did his best to seem only vaguely jealous.

“Yes,” Lucas bit out, finding it much easier to moan than to speak as Will began treating each of his hard, toned biceps to those same hot, wet, biting kisses. Their cocks weren’t sliding together anymore, but he could still feel the heavy throb of his own whenever Will’s belly or thigh rubbed him. And he could feel the answering stiffness of Will down there, too….

“Oh, I mean, yes, I…only have been with women before…none of them complained, by the way, if you’re worried about my skills or anything…”

Will scoffed. “Sorry, babe, you’ve already showed off too much for me to question your *skills* in the sack.”

Lucas beamed proudly, right before he melted into more moans. Will kissed the other side of his neck languorously, then licked and bit at his jawline, softly biting him there and on his chin, tasting the appealing, manly roughness of Lucas’ five o’clock shadow.

“So, these ladies thought you were a good lay, too, huh?” Will played the snarky words off with a laugh and began kissing Lucas’ chest, loving how his nose and mouth were tickled by silvery chest hair.

“Why do you sound so jealous?” Lucas grinned, even prouder. “Over *me?* I can’t even imagine…”

“Try,” Will growled, and he was that feral little wolf again, a major turn-on for Lucas. The older man had tugged on a thread in Will that now unraveled, his possessiveness coming out freely. “It’s a good thing I still get to be your first man. 'Cause I already don’t want anyone else touchin’ you unless I say so and I like them. Your exes sound like *bitches* and I don’t like them. They probably should’ve kept their hands off you, but I’m glad you have your son…”

The remark about Marcus was tacked on so belatedly that Lucas snorted a laugh. “Oh, thank you,*skat.* Hey, I didn’t explain yet, I, uhhh. Ah! *Will*...”

He got distracted when Will’s lips and fingers found his own sensitive nipples, licking and pinching, generally driving Lucas out of his mind as his cock leaked even more pearly, sticky desire. His boxers were definitely done for. And it was all Will’s fault.

“I did think I was probably *biseksuel*...”

“Well, low and behold,” Will laughed breathlessly, looking up from where he’d been obsessively toying with Lucas’ nipples (and sanity). “A *cognate*. Finally! I can understand without asking you to translate. Jesus. Why couldn’t you be Spanish?”

Lucas chortled at this, carding his hands happily through Will's silky brown curls as the younger man's head moved lower. Suspense and excitement were tearing him up, but he answered anyway, managing to produce a cogent, humorous reply.

"I'm sorry. I, too, wish I could be your hot Spanish lover," Lucas sighed jokingly.

Will laughed, kissing all over Lucas' tummy like a man possessed. Lucas felt like his skin kept lighting up, making his whole body flood with delight every time Will pleasured some new part of him. Even his round belly, which he considered one of his worst features, made Will moan and bite excitedly.

"You're so fucking *sexy*, Lucas, oh, *God,*" Will gasped, and Lucas decided that having a round belly was not so bad after all, really not a bad thing –!

"I like my hot *Danish lover* just fine, especially when you make that noise." Will nodded up at Lucas, who had let out a helpless cascade of gasps at the kisses, licking and biting on his previously resented tummy.

Will got him to do *the noise* again, licking once more, not seeming to mind the curling, graying hair that covered so much of Lucas' chest and abdomen that he'd been self-conscious about that, ever since his twenties had introduced the development.

"I love how hairy you are," Will praised, as if he was reading Lucas' mind. Erasing his insecurities one at a time, unasked, just doing it naturally. "So hot…"

Lucas was torn between ecstasy and wondering how Will could possibly mean him, or even be here with him. Gorgeous, wonderful, special, perfect Will…

"*You're* hot," Lucas breathed, a halting, throaty exhale that he nearly choked on as Will's mouth moved even lower.

"Mmm." Will glowed at the compliment as he always did, both of them emotionally touch-starved as much as physically. But he was highly distracted by the sizable bulge making Lucas' cutely plain boxers distend to the point where they seemed about to tear.

"Allow me to proceed with my next lesson, if you will, dear student…" Will drawled blissfully, glancing up at Lucas' heated, undone expression.

Oh, yeah. He wanted nothing more but to make Lucas keep panting and moaning his name like that….all night long.

"You teach me to fish…you'll teach me to fuck a man…" Lucas trembled as Will lifted the waistband of his underwear and began carefully peeling them off. "I'm so lucky to have you, Professor…"

"I'm the lucky one, honey, and I won't ever let you forget it." Will pulled the boxers gently down Lucas' long legs and then off, tossing them on the floor. He kissed and nibbled at the older man's thighs, loving every curve and muscle.

Wriggling impatiently, he got his own boxers off. He kicked them away; they sling-shotted comically against the wall. Good enough for those annoying underwear! He and Lucas should just stay naked all the damn time.

"So, I – *uuuhhhhmmm* – imagine this would be the 'going down on' part of sex. Not so different than with the bitches," Lucas joked shakily.

Yet he quivered even harder as his cock twitched and Will's mouth moved slowly towards the center of his throbbing need.

"Not so different, except *I'm* gonna treat you right. Spoil you, make you all mine…" Will had reached that sensual delirium where, quite by accident, he was 'showing his crazy.'

He knew it was unstable and wrong, making these statements with someone he had known less than twenty-four hours, but he was too wrapped up in immense arousal and happiness to even care. He just said what he felt. Lucas sure didn't seem to be objecting, not with the way he moaned so loudly and clutched at Will's curls, swearing like what Will could only assume was a Danish pirate.

"I'd love to be yours," Lucas sighed, surprising Will in his sweet, incomparable way yet again. "Make me all yours, Will."

Will's heart jumped as his cock dripped all over the sheets, pulse pounding, sweat pouring off him, it seemed, totally consumed as he was by the shock of understanding, reciprocation, acceptance and untarnished joy. Then, it was so hard to even take that in at the same time that his body was rocked by erotic frenzy, and there was *Lucas* – perfect Lucas, with his own dripping manhood, musky, hot and so hard that it was reddened, even near-purple at the tip.

Now, Will's experiences with men before had been "fine;" experimenting was what college was for, and a few trysts had been a whole lot of fun. He had not particularly minded that those encounters tended to be tipsy one night stands where he never heard from the guy again, not taking it personally as it just…was what it was. If they saw one another at some random party where Will was holding up a wall and dying to get out of there, they'd likely go to one of their dorms and fuck again, and then not call again. It never mattered.

But he wasn't sewing his wild oats anymore. And he knew, as he wrapped his hand tightly around the straining, huge cock and felt it throb desperately, as Lucas was now so overwhelmed he was covering his eyes, clutching Will's hair in a vice grip, silent with shocked pleasure. He knew that even if he'd met Lucas in his college days, he would never want a one night stand or keeping it casual.

Even eighteen to twenty-three year old Will Graham would have known the real thing, and the difference between easy pleasure that one barely thought about afterwards, and the earth-shaking intertwined lust and affection he felt for Lucas.

He'd *always* have felt this way for Lucas, even as a dumb kid, and more, so much more now, as a man who'd weathered storms so savage they could hardly be explained. With a throb in his heart this time, he registered that he was falling for Lucas and he was most likely going to feel that way, too, always.

“That’s it, honey,” he said thickly, licking slowly, savoring as he traced a bulging vein in Lucas’ massive hard on, making a wet path up to the dripping head before he sucked on it, swallowing bitter precum. “So hard and big for me, Lucas…you taste unbelievable…”

When it came to combining touch with dirty talk, they were equally matched. Lucas was now hazily twisting and thumbing over his own nipples as his whole body trembled. His hips tried to arch up and fuck into Will’s mouth from the sheer pleasure of having what he barely even *remembered:* someone’s lips wrapped around his aching girth, lapping at him, sucking, wetly stroking with a tight grip, *owning* him with effortless power.

‘Someone?’ Oh, God. There had never really been anyone else, had there? No one could compare. He had never felt anything this good.

“There you go, big boy…” Will stroked him with a firm, slow, rhythmic glide of his calloused workman’s skin against Lucas’ hotly engorged dick. When he licked from head to base this time, he lowered his face more and took each of Lucas’ balls into his mouth, sucking, rolling them on his tongue, moaning in obvious arousal and delight.

Lucas had never been this enjoyed and savored. He’d always been the one to go down and the one to fuck, and his body was...appreciated *used,* really. But never worshiped. Will was so drunk on him that Lucas got the uncanny feeling his lover would be perfectly happy licking and sucking his cock and balls for hours, if the urgent need of their first time wasn’t pressing him forward.

“Oh,” Will said with a flutter of his lashes, his red and swollen lips curving in an impressed smile of amazement. Lucas was still playing with his nipples, looking down at Will at work, then closing his eyes because the sight was too much to handle. And his already thick, intimidatingly big cock had gotten even harder.

“Horny boy,” Will added lovingly. “Damn, you really need to fuck, huh?”

“I never needed it this much,” Lucas trembled, flicking shaking fingers over hard nipples still wet from Will’s mouth. “Tell me what I need to do for you next, *skat.* Please?”

“You ain’t gotta say please when it comes to fucking me, darlin’.” Will smiled, rolling his eyes at himself when he moved up on the bed and settled next to his lover, cupping Lucas’ face, comforting him with caresses. “Wow. It’s been at least a decade since ‘ain’t’ came outta my mouth. You’re regressing me to a horny teenager, Lucas, know that?”

“I'm glad,” Lucas said excitedly.

He rolled over on top of Will and immediately went for the younger man’s beautiful chest, sucking hard on each nipple before licking them and using his fingers to make Will dizzily moan.

“I have an idea about the next part, I think,” Lucas hazarded a guess with his dwindling brain cells as the blood in his body only seemed to be rushing downward.

He could feel the very air of the room gently sweeping over his cock where it was still damp from Will, and it made his stomach flutter, electric pleasure and unbearable need almost stealing his English skills.

Will's body felt so damn good, and he really did look like a movie star, Lucas marveled. It was once again hard to believe that someone with a body like this – an Adonis or David – would give Lucas the time of day, never mind need him desperately in return.

"You're beautiful," Lucas soothed, taking the edge off Will's own rising crisis of need. He felt how Will's heart slammed in racing, harsh exhilaration, and the throbbing heat of Will's cock against his thigh, making his mouth water. "Let me just…" His lips drifted down Will's flat stomach, covering alabaster skin with hot bites and licks before noticing the next scar. He traced a finger over the slightly raised, angry slice on Will's belly.

Lucas didn't say anything aloud. It sounded like Will's former career had been dangerous, but he'd never thought of anything so scary and terrible happening to the lovely man in his arms. He tried not to cry because even with a limited understanding of such matters, Lucas knew Will had most likely been gutted with a knife.

Instead of saying any useless words or asking dumb questions, Lucas led with his heart and gave Will what he thought Will needed more. He kissed the scar tenderly, then flicked his tongue against it, affirming his earlier remark that the scars were sexy – and even though he hated the idea of Will being hurt so badly, they were unbearably erotic.

Will cried out with a ragged moan when Lucas worshiped his belly scar. "God, I could come just from that, you're pulling me to pieces. Want you inside me so bad…"

"Yeah, *min elskede*," Lucas said with a speeding pulse and his heart in his throat. Given that he'd blurted "*my beloved*" without meaning to say it out loud, he was grateful he was *not* Spanish or French, and that Danish was quirkier, with less cognates or shared words that matched English.

Plus, Will was far too undone to ask for translations. He just let the words sink into his skin as he longed for Lucas to sink heavily and deeply into his body.

"I never dated a man before, because I come from a small town and I never met a man I liked that way," Lucas explained throatily, transfixed by Will's beauty. A dark, erotic angel, luscious beyond compare.

"But," he added, gulping past another wave of strong arousal, "I watched a lot of porn. So let me try and figure it out. I think you're a little beyond teaching now, yeah?"

Will shivered, "Yes," with a ragdoll tone. "Can't even think. Just do whatever you want with me. Please."

"You don't have to beg, *puttemus*, but you're very cute when you do. I could definitely get addicted to that, fast."

“Did you have to tell me you watched gay porn?” Will gripped Lucas’ hair in a painfully tight tug, which felt wonderful.

Will needed *Lucas*, of all people. It was beyond remarkable, or anything Lucas had ever thought he’d get to have, given his own dark and painful history. His scars might be on the inside, but he thought they bore similar wounds.

“Not sorry, I like turning you on. You are also my pretty, sweet *puttemus* when you are this overwhelmed. Like you would die if you don’t get my cock inside your pretty hole…”

“For fuck’s sake!” Will trembled almost convulsively from head to toe as Lucas dipped his head and sucked at his cock, trying out what he’d seen on the screen with a very real, flesh and blood male.

And this, too, was perfect, just shattering. Will almost screamed as Lucas hummed in intrigued, fascinated, happy delight and started bobbing his head faster, eagerly taking more and more.

Agonized pleasure took over Will’s body, making his hips jolt forward on their own volition. Before he knew it, he was fucking Lucas’ mouth and *hard*, too, without a warning. He couldn’t stop.

“Shit,” he said, and ground his teeth. “Oh my fucking God, you’re doing so well, Lucas, *oh, God…!”*

Lucas took to the mouth-fucking so nicely that it blew Will’s mind all over again. If Will wanted anything, Lucas was all in, he didn’t express any worries or hesitation. He just learned as he went, combining porn studies (the extensive kind that happened during a *loooong* time of being single) with the throbbing, happy reality of Will’s hot length repeatedly thrusting into him.

Working on common sense assumptions and a heady fever of pleasure, Lucas tried keeping his lips tight, but his jaw relaxed, as much as he could. This seemed to be right, and he was so excited when Will said so with more gritty swears and thrusting.

The older man remembered one more thing that was always included in gay foreplay, so when he pulled his mouth off with a wet pop, still stroking Will the way he liked to be stroked himself, he went down on his elbows, widely parting Will’s thighs. As his lover shook like a leaf and stared at him, Lucas placed a pillow underneath Will’s plump, pert backside, then let go of the beautiful cock filling his hand. This, he did in the interest of guiding Will’s pretty legs right over his shoulders.

Will dissolved into hapless moans and exclamations as Lucas embarked on his next lesson: eating Will’s hole out like it was his new job, and he was obsessed with that damn job, intending to put in a whole lot of overtime.

Lucas sank into the simple delight of giving Will pleasure. The sight of the tight, pink pucker had been enough excitement, but to feel Will gradually relaxing for him was next level.

“You’re so, so beautiful,” he murmured, licking Will’s hole again, then experimenting by blowing on it.

“*Ah*–” Will’s hips arched, a very good sign. Lucas gripped the younger man’s firm calves and caressed them, and then he got back to work, burying his face and licking so deeply that his tongue penetrated Will’s opening, pressing the tip inside.

“Fuck-fuck-*fuck-fuck– Lucas!* You, you – you’re – I’m –” Will’s mind was wiped totally blank as white hot pleasure swallowed him whole.

A crashing orgasm made his hole clamp down, briefly capturing the tip of Lucas’ tongue in a way that made them both even lustier. Lucas followed this by lapping extravagantly all over Will’s hole, lavishing it as the orgasm went on with wave upon wave that shook the younger man to the core.

Will could do nothing but allow his hips to relax back down on the bed and rest his ass on the pillow when Lucas finally had enough – for now, at least – of his musky heat and taste, the barer-than-naked, vulnerable act of putting his mouth in such a sensitive, personal place. Lucas was overcome with the prideful happiness of actually making Will orgasm, like he’d won six hundred lotteries all at once.

He stared at the spill of thick white cum all over Will’s lovely stomach, then leaned over it and dipped his head, lapping it into his mouth with needy, throaty groans. Will was still nothing more than a vessel full of more pleasure than he could take. Even coming all over himself had not been a full release of the bliss that was tearing him to shreds.

“We’re so good together,” Will managed to say in a weak rasp. Tears slipped down both his cheeks, and Lucas kissed them away.

“Yes, my angel.” This particular endearment, bluntly and sincerely uttered in whispering English as Lucas warmly kissed his face, made the younger man’s chest shake as he cried again.

“I’m no angel,” Will insisted, even as Lucas kissed and stroked these tears away, too, his handsome features etched in complete worship that explained the pet name. “But…” he quivered from raw emotion as much as erotic craving. “I feel like I could be when I’m with you.”

“*Angel*,” Lucas said, his own voice even more insistent.

Tearfully, Will smiled, as if Lucas had both plunged a knife into his heart and saved his life. “Side table drawer,” he whispered.

Lucas found the lube and made them both nice and slick, soon kissing Will dizzy again as his fingers worked him open on the same exceptionally adept learning curve. He just couldn’t help throwing his energy into this with all his might; how could he? Will was the most precious person in the universe, and his gorgeous body was a velvet paradise, sucking Lucas’ big fingers in eagerly, first just one, eventually building to three with a fast, hard thrust.

“Just –” Will struggled to get his breath back, gasping more with each thrust. Lucas was getting confident and better, every time his fingers glided in and out. “Just curve your fingers a little, like – *oh Jesus!*”

Lucas had followed the hint, taking a guess at the angle, almost instantly finding Will’s prostate with an intoxicating sweep of thick fingertips to swollen bud of pure ecstasy.

Will was now weeping just from pleasure, and he was doing the cute begging again, over and over as Lucas learned to fuck him right and hit the spot. Finally, Lucas couldn’t take it anymore, and he leaned over Will’s pretty, crying, angel face, murmuring, “Relax for me, okay?”

He lined up and pressed in far easier than he’d have guessed, but then, they had been at the foreplay for well over an hour. A lot of that time had been spent on getting Will ready, but *this* – the exquisite, shocking glide into all of that tight, clutching heat, so soft inside, hugging him and drawing him deeper – was –

“Fuck,” Lucas muttered, his voice guttural as he slowly pulled back and pushed in again, this time gliding right to the hilt. He was buried so deep inside Will that he felt another jolt of disbelieving euphoria shoot through him. And Will was encouraging him steadily, wordlessly, again with ragdoll weak supplications, this time offered in shaking, silent touches.

He crossed his legs behind Lucas’ back and held tight, then used his strong muscles to push so Lucas knew he wanted it that deep, right away. Lucas didn’t ask if he was hurting Will, not when he was told so clearly what to do.

Surely, Lucas wasn’t here to coddle when Will had such needs, making the younger man whimper in his strong arms, encompassed completely by Lucas’ bigger body on top of him, fucking into him.

Lucas kept the thrusts long, slow and deep, and the feeling of Will’s tight body hugging him, the heaven of Will on the inside was enough to take, but then the fucking sounds he’d never experienced, not like this – the skin-pounding noise whenever his cock bottomed out, his body shoving down on Will’s, and the obscene slap of his heavy balls against Will’s beautiful, round, smooth ass –

Suddenly the hardest task of Lucas’ life was before him: he didn’t want to come yet, and he knew he’d never be able to last. So it was really a matter of holding off as long as he could, not expecting the impossible.

“I wanna ride you,” said Will in a threadbare voice.

The look on his face was exactly like he’d been punched hard with excessive, suffocating amounts of everything good.

Lucas could find no more suitable answer than to turn onto his back. When his cock slipped from Will’s hole for a few moments, he let out a gasp of loss that made Will moan, “Yeah, I know. Here…”

Will straddled Lucas; his legs were trembling hard, but he was determined. Lucas stared up at him as Will grasped his lover's aching cock and guided it slowly inside his tight hole. And the younger man let out a low, dragging moan, the sound of it striking Lucas like dagger-sharp nails digging into his skin and raking down his back.

"Holy fuck, Lucas," Will said breathily when he had the older man's cock fully seated in his clenching walls. "Holy – fuck –"

"Feels so good," Lucas moaned, but it wasn't just the way Will rode him, chasing pleasure and taking it from Lucas' cock with every ounce of strength he had left.

It took focus to writhe atop Lucas and get the angle to best pleasure them both, but Will had that last vestige of clarity to devote into this most worthy purpose.

The other dimension of having Will this way was the source of Lucas' most agonizing joy. Will looked like the most obscenely stunning, ravishing angel, his curly head flung back as he worked his hips, grinding down and taking Lucas, bouncing in the older man's lap as Lucas held his hips and massaged them.

Will was so beautiful, he really was poetry in motion. Concentrating while torn apart by pleasure, he bit his sumptuous lip. His absolutely perfect, startlingly gorgeous face expressed unbelievable ecstasies. Lucas gazed at how strained and shocked Will's expression was, then gasped when Will hit his prostate better than ever with Lucas' cock. Will's vivid, ethereal blue eyes flew open and he grinned all of a sudden, then sped up his bouncing, which was exactly when Lucas knew.

"I'm gonna come, Will," he rasped in warning; Will just leaned over and kissed his mouth, then muttered with certainty.

"Come in me, don't pull out," Will begged, still moving his ass slowly back and forth, taking every inch of Lucas over and over. "I wish I could keep you here forever."

"I do, too," said Lucas, misty-eyed, red in the face and covered in sex sweat. He'd never meant anything more.

"I want your cum," Will moaned, sitting back on Lucas' cock, then riding again with merciless skill.

Lucas made it a whole five more deep thrusts of that before he exploded into Will with a gush of cum that felt like more than he'd ever come with before. He shot it into Will, instinctively sitting up and wrapping his arms around Will's waist, keeping his hot seed as deep as he possibly could. He had been moaning and crying out some sort of alarmed litany of pleasure-addled, tormented bliss but barely heard himself. There was Will, taking over every one of his senses as he gasped and grinned wider when Lucas emptied into him. Will, gruffly chanting his name, riding him longer and making Lucas' orgasm go on – and *on* –

It took a sharp turn to oversensitivity and he actually didn't even care, there was a sweetness to that small pain, and it was completely enclosed inside their pleasure. But he didn't feel much of it before Will came again, so hard his body shook uncontrollably. His cum shot out

in even thicker ropes than before, covering Lucas, mostly his stomach, but also his chest, his upper arm, even a drop or two on his face.

Will leaned over him, still keeping Lucas inside, and fed the cum into Lucas' eager mouth, groaning when Lucas fellated his fingers. The restless, greedy passion of their sex lingered on, even when Will climbed off of Lucas. They exchanged a heated look that said it all.

Despite wishing they could keep going, Lucas was also aware of a deep, overpowering and delightful sleepy feeling. His whole body felt both heavy and lighter than air; his mind was at ease, not a single stressful memory or worry for the future. No self-doubts, just happiness and a wish for more days and nights like this.

Will kissed Lucas and shook his head because he was shaking and breathing too hard to speak just yet. Lucas stroked his sweaty curls and then went into the adjoining bathroom, returning to clean Will with slow, loving care, then taking care of the mess on his own body, impressed by how thoroughly they'd ruined each other. And it was only their first try!

"We really made a mess of each other," Lucas said, blushing, grinning. "Um, Will, are you still awake enough to shower? I don't think the cloth is gonna be enough here."

Will opened one eye. "Mmmkay, I think I can take a shower long as we help each other wash up. Then I need to sleep for...oh, about a year."

"Only till morning, *skat,*" Lucas smiled, guiding Will as the younger man did his best on *very* shaky legs. "I'd miss you and wake you up."

***

"Was it good for you?" Lucas asked, lying down beside Will to caress his face and kiss his forehead.

Their skin was dewy with the heat and freshness of a shower, and they both smelled of Will's piney shampoo and eucalyptus body wash (it had been on sale).

"Was it *good* for me? Is that a joke?" Will's words came sluggishly, but his brows shot up as he still did his best to breathe normally and not let trembling cause him to fall off the bed. Hot water, soothing soap and Lucas' strong arms, lazy kisses and kind assistance had done *nothing* to help him recover from this post-coital daze.

"Lucas. I think I can't feel my toes or remember the alphabet. That was so far beyond good – I don't even know what to say because you stole my vocabulary with your goddamn beautiful body. Your *cock,* oh my God…" Will buried his face in Lucas' chest, nuzzling into the hair and sighing. "Oh. God." He shivered. "I still feel it. You inside me. My fucking ears are ringing. How's that for an answer?"

"I'm glad, so glad," Lucas said, smiling brightly and hugging Will close. Their naked bodies still felt delicious together, even without any sexual implications. "Oh, Will, you really are my treasure. How did I get lucky enough that you found me?"

“I’m lucky,” Will murmured, kissing Lucas over his hammering heartbeat. “So lucky, I’m convinced this is like…the longest dream ever. Please, don’t let me wake up? I need to sleep. But if I’m dreaming will *that* make me wake up? Are you really real?”

“Are you, angel?” Lucas kissed his head and smelled his hair, rubbing his cheek against it as he added, “I think we both are. I’ll hold you and we can both sleep. We’ll protect each other and make sure we don’t wake up, even when we wake up.”

“We’re inventing some kind of deeply weird terminology and descriptive references of our own, and I…love that,” Will smiled, his lips warm and soft as he kept kissing Lucas’ chest, then his neck. “Okay, you got a deal. The dogs are all set for the night…”

He yawned, tightening his grip on Lucas the way a child clung to their stuffed animal while drifting to sleep. “I set the alarm every day so I’m up to give them breakfast and their first walk. You sleep as late as you want.”

“Hmm. It’s cute that you really think I’d let you out of my sight.” Lucas’ eyes closed as a heavy blanket of slumber descended on his mind and body.

Will laughed. “Did you just fall asleep?” He looked up to see Lucas conked out, snoring lightly. “God, why are you so damn cute?”

In his sleep, Lucas hugged Will with a stubborn look, as if someone would take Will away. But they never would.

Chapter End Notes

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End notes:
“kintsugi: a traditional Japanese pottery repair technique in which lacquer mixed with precious metals, especially gold, is used to fill cracks and replace missing pieces.” (Dictionary.com)

“Kintsugi” is the song by Lana Del Rey from which I also got the name of the story. It seemed like an appropriate title for this chapter. As Lana sings, “*Think by the third of March, I was cracked open*
Finally, the ground was cold, they wouldn't open
Brought by the sunlight of the spirit to pour into me”

Will and Lucas are both that broken, fragile teacup, and they’re pouring gold into each other, mending the old wounds and inventing new beauty to share. 🥹🤧😭

2. *Yes*, Hannibal is coming. I am leaving him out intentionally until a certain turn of the plot, for suspense and dramatic effect. It’s what Hannibal would want, too, let’s face it! 😈

3. **Next time:** Well, I guess all the conversations and new couple activities which were supposed to be in *this* chapter until they fucked for…(checks) around *27 pages* (!!!). [Lol, why couldn't it be *meeeee* (either one of them, I won't be picky!) – long, bitter waillll…….❤️🔥😩)

last night, this morning…and tonight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"People always take a step away from what is true
That's why I like you around
I want you…

You want to know
How deeply my soul goes
Deeper than bones" -third eye blind

***

"Good morning, Sunshine," Will smiled, sighing in utter contentment as he snuggled Lucas against his chest.

Lucas was adorably slow to wake up. He said something under his breath in Danish that might not even have made sense in Danish. And then, he rubbed his face against Will's chest and hugged him tighter.

"*Fem minutter mere*," Lucas mumbled insistently.

"Aha," Will enthused brightly as he massaged Lucas' back, enjoying the weight and warmth of the older man's delicious naked form against his own. "Another cognate. Did you seriously just say five more minutes, like a twelve year old?"

Lucas blinked up at him as Will's features came slowly into focus. "Wh–"

He glanced down at his naked arm wound possessively around Will's waist and the light marks of fingerprints and scratches which covered both of them from the night before. "Oh. You're real? Hi."

"I'm real, baby. I'm right here," Will reassured him, as his heart lurched because Lucas did not seem to be kidding at all. He really thought Will might have been a dream, along with the happiness they'd found.

Will didn't say a word about that; the knowledge of it made his gaze even softer as he felt tenderness bursting out of every part of him. Finally, all of the affection and care inside him had someplace to land.

Somebody wanted Will, somebody incredibly special. A rare person, the sort of person Will thought of as magical. And that someone wanted to care for Will *without* hurting him. Quite the opposite, in fact. What a marvel.

Lucas yawned and reached for his glasses. For a moment, he was even more solidly pressed against Will, causing the younger man's typically alert morning erection to twitch, wetting

the sheets they'd already changed with precum.

With pure mischief in mind, Will yawned, too, and casually rolled over onto his side, facing away from Lucas. "A few more cuddles?" he begged sweetly.

"Of course, *puttemus*, do you truly believe I can say no?"

Lucas spooned up behind Will, wrapping his wonderfully strong arm around the younger man. With a sigh, he smelled Will's curls, kissed the top of his head, caressed Will's belly slowly.

"I can practically hear you smirking, handsome," Will drawled, "Somethin' on your mind? Don't tell me you think I have ulterior motives for draggin' you back into bed with me."

"Dragging?" Lucas laughed. "That will never happen. I would get into bed with you every time. Right away."

Will shifted back a little, positioning his ass closer to Lucas' own morning erection. "Good to know."

"You didn't have any reason for wanting me back? You're just going to take a little nap, darling?" Lucas sounded suspicious.

With that, Will lifted Lucas' beautiful hand from where it rested (casually – which felt so good) on his stomach. He placed slow, sensuous kisses on each finger, then the palm. His heart clutched at the subtle indentation, just a faint mark from where Lucas used to wear a wedding ring, and he needed Lucas inside him.

"*You,* ulterior motives?" Lucas chuckled, "You're right, it's impossible."

He groaned as Will treated his hand and wrist to more wet, shameless, warm kisses, teasing each finger one at a time, tracing them with his tongue and then nibbling lightly, ending with a brief suck.

Will also moved back as far as he could, to press his soft, bare ass directly against the older man's hard, equally naked cock.

Lucas sighed, "Is it too late to take back calling you angel?"

"I'm afraid so," Will grinned. The smile melted into a moan as he rocked back against Lucas' impressive morning wood. His stubble rubbed on Lucas' hand as he nuzzled there, and then he was gently biting Lucas' wrist.

"Oh, you're the devil," Lucas laughed, pulling Will closer.

They kept laughing as, awkwardly, they rolled over until Will was on top. Lucas groped his ass and thighs and kissed Will hotly. Then he used his grip on Will to move the younger man up and down, grinding their cocks together.

The pleasure momentarily erased the memory of Hannibal which had intruded when Lucas jokingly called Will the devil. To assuage the hunger pangs for the Ripper that would never go away, he pulled his thoughts back. Instead of staying in the pain of the past, he'd focus on being happy in the present.

Lucas cupped his ass cheeks more roughly, rubbing his dick against Will's more firmly and quickly, licking into his lover's mouth. This felt indescribably amazing, so that it healed the worst of Will's twinge, that incurable love for another.

The need for Hannibal quieted, but it was still there under Will's skin. He had learned to breathe in and out while accepting what he could not change. He loved the devil incarnate. If anyone was an angel, it was Lucas. And he adored Lucas so much.

"I don't deserve you," Will whispered, deliriously blissful and melancholy all at once.

"Of course you do." Lucas looked at him in disbelief, then took his glasses off again, setting them aside. "Let me show you."

He kissed Will, and Will kissed him; this led to more slightly confused sexual choreography that brought more laughs. Distracted by each others' mouths, they tumbled randomly around the bed. When Will looked at their actual position again, they were face to face, lying on their sides. Will automatically threw his leg over Lucas' hip, bringing their groins together as Lucas hugged him.

Will had no idea how they ended up this way, but it was so cute. So tenderly intimate, like two sweethearts who didn't ever want to be separated if they could help it. His heart beat harder, not only because Lucas got his bearings and started kissing Will's neck, running a hand down his side to squeeze his hip. Maybe those two wildly infatuated lovers were exactly what they were becoming.

It really threw Will for the best imaginable loop to find that sex with Lucas could be so passionate, intense and pleasurable, but also full of adoring sweetness and even the occasional cute mistake. This felt perfect, yet it was different from how he imagined that Hannibal made love…all grand, bleakly gothic and operatic with lots of really kinky aspects, blood involved in some way, surely.

Since Hannibal clearly wasn't going to stop echoing in his mind and heart, Will stopped trying to smother the memories and questions. That was too distracting from his current happiness; instead, he let the thoughts happen, but then tried to let them slide away. An imperfect system, but it seemed to work a lot better than the painful repression.

"Try going into your favorite 'cuddling' position, *skat,*" Lucas suggested. The humor in his tone was laced through with deep lust. "I have another idea."

He reached his long arm behind him to grab the lube and Will curled up as the little spoon. Soon after, he felt Lucas beginning to enter him, slowly stretching his hole and sliding in, easy because of all they had done the night before. Lucas kissed the back of Will's neck and lazily played with his nipples. Will's mouth fell open at first in shocked silence at the sudden, tremendous bliss of Lucas filling him.

Then he gave a punched out little moan that made Lucas growl, nibble his ear, and press in more firmly. He was able to bottom out with another smooth forward glide, and they both groaned in deep pleasure. Will grabbed his own thigh and moved his leg up, bending his knee, giving Lucas easier access to his hole.

"*åh gud!*" Lucas gasped, starting to slowly pound into Will as they remained spooning. "Will, you're – so beautiful, you make me feel so – so *good*–"

"I can't believe this is happening to me," Will sighed. Tears misted his vision as pleasure overwhelmed him with every thrust. "Oh, God, Lucas, yeah…yeah…!"

"You shouldn't be surprised I wanted to fuck you again in the morning," said Lucas, his voice gritty as he pounded in harder, finding Will's prostate with a smile of triumph.

There was no doubting it, not with the way Will's moan heightened and became almost a howl.

"Mmm." Lucas kissed his neck again and continued fucking in those long, slow, drags out and smooth, deep, hard thrusts in. "Your body is amazing, so sexy…"

"Fuck me harder, please – a little faster?" Will pleaded shakily, needing it that way, and Lucas rewarded him immediately.

"Turn over, beautiful," Lucas grinned.

As soon as Will did, Lucas easily landed on top of him from behind. Will was flat to the bed, moaning uncontrollably into a pillow as Lucas blanketed him with his big, warm, powerful body and fucked.

"You like that, huh, angel?" Lucas sounded proud, but definitely out of breath as he bit Will's neck, then his unscarred shoulder, and slammed into Will over and over.

He was so deep, hitting Will's prostate right on target with every harsh, wonderful thrust. Will was in no condition to question being an "angel" again, although it did make him a little smug as Lucas fucked the living daylights out of him. The heavy slap of skin to skin made it deliciously dirtier, and both of them were moaning loudly now, close to climax.

"*Harder,*" Will begged, needing more, more, *Lucas*—

Lucas snarled and fucked Will so hard it made the younger man cry out in mixed pain and pleasure, but as the two sensations combined, he felt the orgasm building inside him, much stronger for the force with which he was fucked. He clung to the pillow and sheets, tears trailing down his face and took it, so happy that it had begun to feel like a surreal blur. When his orgasm hit, Lucas knew because of how Will clenched around him, trembled and cried harder, "Oh, God, fuck, *fuck,* ah–*God,* Lucas!"

So right then, Lucas thrust in to the hilt and remained buried in Will, growling with a soft intensity again, as if he were an animal marking his territory, reminding Will who he

belonged to. Lost in pleasure, Will let himself feel like he belonged to this nice man he'd just met yesterday, who probably deserved better than a mess like Will. It was so damn good.

Lucas only lasted a few more thrusts before he bit Will's shoulder harder and filled him with seed, everything between them drenched in this sweet, hot, unbearably pleasurable sensation. Everything between them felt right, especially Lucas filling him to the hilt and coming in him warmly, clutching Will and muttering swears in Danish. Finally, as he fucked through his orgasm, he moaned Will's name repeatedly, tugging the younger man's curls as his own body shook. "Will," Lucas groaned. "So good…feels so perfect inside you…"

"You feel so perfect inside me." Will was breathless, tear-streaked, sweaty and tousle-curled, grinning and blushing.

Lucas lay on top of him a little longer, keeping Will euphorically full. He kissed Will's neck, shoulders and upper back with a kind of fascination which Will couldn't fathom. His chest was hot with sweat that had dampened his silver chest hair, his cock was still enormous and splitting Will in two, his long legs rested over Will's and his sighing, heavy breaths of incomparable ecstasy went on, tickling Will's ear. Will could feel everything, from the soft roundness of the older man's belly against his low back, to the pounding of his heartbeat.

"Holy shit," Will said, finding his voice a hoarse remnant.

Playfully, Lucas switched position and laid Will on his back so he could look down at his lover. His hand fell into Will's sweaty curls and tangled them around his fingers as he stared into Will's eyes, utter wonderment flooding the dark amber gaze.

"Holy shit, Lucas," Will repeated, panting and smiling.

"Yeah," Lucas grinned, so pleased to have given Will what was needed. "I'm glad you liked it." He looked down for a few beats, blushing furiously. "Still new at this…"

"I more than liked it. C'mere, baby, show me your pretty face again." Will cupped the older man's face in his warm hands. Lucas shivered in continually surprised happiness at the touch.

"I more than like *you*, Lucas." Will said it before he could think about it.

"Ooops, I know that's too soon, like 'stage five clinger Lifetime movie stalker' too soon…"

"I more than like you, too, Will…" Lucas was glowing. "Did you not mean to tell me that?"

"I didn't mean to," Will explained. He turned redder, lifting up to hug Lucas and hide his face. "It was just the way you were so glad you gave me pleasure. It was how much you wanted me to feel that good, and it was that adorable fucking thing you do when you get all bashful and overwhelmed…"

"Ohhh," Lucas chuckled, too rapturous at the almost-I-love-you's to feel self-conscious. "Well, thank you. Always speak as you want with me, Will. I'll always listen and I'll always more than like you. I want to know what is on, eh, in your brain? Or mind? Whichever makes more sense. And I want to know how your heart feels, all the time."

“You’re on and in my brain.” Will kissed his chest, “Thanks, lover. You can do the same with me, okay? We’re the place each of us can always run. So what if it would sound insane to anyone but us? They’re not us.”

“No, they’re not us, they don’t feel this.” Lucas threaded their fingers together and gazed at their joined hands, eyes wet and a goofy smile on his face that made Will’s heart somersault. “And they don’t get to wake up with you, hear your kind, wonderful words and feel your body, kiss those sweet lips you have…they could never know.”

“I know,” Will laughed, a very serious laugh, one of ecstatic joy and an understanding of how profound the words were. The nonsensical, repetitive words. Their own language, something beyond English or Danish.

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“Aww, wouldn’t you know I’m out of eggs and flour?” Will gazed into his nearly empty fridge and cabinets as if staring into the abyss. “I really wanted to make you breakfast. Eggs and pancakes…”

Clad in his uniform of denim and flannel, with his glasses on and hair still slightly damp from another post-sex shower, Will turned to face his lover with a disappointed pout.

Lucas shrugged, straining the cord on the bathrobe Will had loaned him every time he moved. Will ogled his perfect chest and watched how his broad shoulders made the dip in the neckline grow. He was fairly sure the robe might fall to the floor with Lucas’ next breath, and it was a cheering thought.

“A *second* breakfast, you mean?”

Will groaned softly and padded over to the older man in his slippers. He tugged the pine green cotton collar of the robe as Lucas’ hands fell to his hips.

“Darlin’, if you don’t want me to tear that robe off you and let you carry me to the nearest surface, we’re gonna have to focus.” Will’s lustful desire caused his Southern drawl to emerge strongly, slowing the words with a sugary accent.

Lucas tightened his grip on Will, then slid his hands up to the younger man’s waist, smirking. “I suppose you’re right. If we keep giving in every time we want to, well, the showers are going to become pointless. And we’ll starve to death.”

“That’s right. Although I don’t know why you’ve got to look like that.”

Lucas ducked his chin with that signature shy smile. “You already fed me lunch and dinner yesterday,” he reasoned. “Shouldn’t breakfast be on me?”

“I won’t hear of it.” Will raised his eyebrows. “Lucas…you said you like giving me exactly what I want, right?”

“Yes,” Lucas nodded.

“Well…I want to take care of you. It makes me happy. Maybe I sound more than a little crazy, but I love looking after you. Getting you to smile, giving you things and experiences, making you feel…safe. And at home.” Will let out a long, heavy breath. “That was a lot. I know it was a lot. It was an effort to get myself to come out and say it.”

Lucas’ lower lip wobbled. He pressed his lips together and shook his head apologetically. His hands trembled on Will’s waist, and a tearful gulp broke through his attempt to smother his weeping. Embarrassed, he sighed and slid his glasses to the top of his head, sweeping locks of damp hair back to reveal his chiseled, beautiful face. Reddened eyes and streaks of helpless tears only enhanced how lovable and gorgeous he was to Will.

“Oh, honey.” Will wrapped Lucas in his arms, stroked his hair, and let Lucas cry into his shoulder as the older man’s whole body shuddered. “It’s okay, it’s all gonna be okay now.”

Lucas nodded, adorably unable to stop crying as his fingers dug into Will’s arms. Will rocked him slowly back and forth, murmuring words of comforting reassurance, infinitely patient.

“Did I upset you?” he asked softly, “I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

“I don’t know how to…” Lucas shook his head emphatically and sobbed. “Oh, Will, how to t-th-thank you for how kind and wonderful…no one ever…t-too-took care of me before… everyone hates me back home, they all think I’m disgusting but you’re….so beautiful and you don’t think that…I never thought…*Hundrede hjerter ville være for få til at bære al min kærlighed til dig.*”

Will could tell that whatever Lucas had just said in his native tongue was so painfully sensitive, he shouldn’t ask for a translation anytime soon.

“How could anyone ever hate you?” Will’s eyes turned cold and dark above Lucas’ view. “How could anyone think you’re disgusting? I don’t understand why someone would see you as otherwise than lovable and honorable, and deserving of every good thing in the world.”

I’d love to skin them alive. Will bit his lip hard to keep his violent thoughts inside. He held Lucas even closer. *I’d love to feed them to those wild hogs Mason Verger used to have. If I knew exactly where those horrible people are…*

“Will?” Lucas looked up at him, his glasses crookedly propped on his head, perched in his hair. Another plump tear slid down the side of his nose and he sniffled adorably. “What is it?”

“It makes me angry when you tell me how they treated you back where you’re from.” Will’s self-control had become far more slippery than the tears flowing freely down Lucas’ pretty face. He fought to maintain some kind of composure. “It makes me. *Very angry*, Lucas.”

The wrath in his heart came out in his deadly-quiet tone, and Lucas clasped his face, gently kissing his forehead, soothing Will’s rage.

“I’m grateful you care so much. I only had one friend, and my son, stand up for me during my hard times. But please, don’t be upset. Let’s enjoy being here, today, in this moment. Isn’t that better?”

“I didn’t scare you, did I?”

With their faces close, Will searched Lucas’, finding nothing but unconditional admiration and affection. Lucas still looked at Will as if Will was an angel on high, not the raging, bloodthirsty demon who secretly fumed inside him, planning heinous vengeances.

“Of course not, Will.” Lucas kissed both his cheeks, stroking his jaw. “I could never fear you. Be angry when you need to. But I can’t promise not to try and cheer you up.”

“Oh, God, you do that by existing, baby.” Will hugged him again and rubbed his back. He sighed, feeling better.

“We both care a lot about each others’ comfort and happiness,” Lucas reflected. “That’s one reason you’re so special, although there’s so many. Most people don’t care, ever.”

Will nodded with a gulp past his own urge to cry – they would be complicated tears with too many conflicted emotions to safely vent.

“Or they just care about themselves.”

“I can’t be happy if the people I care for aren’t happy.”

“Neither can I.” Will moved back slightly and took Lucas hand, kissing the older man’s knuckles. “Okay…idea. We could go to the country store in town. I can get some food for home in their grocery area. And they have a little restaurant in the back with all-day breakfast; we could eat there. Um, because I can feel your tummy rumbling, and I’m gonna take care of that, if you want.”

“I want.” Lucas’ cheeks turned pink. “Are you volunteering to go out in public where there are *people*?”

They both laughed. “I’m a little different around you. I’m still me, essentially, but you bring out a me who feels more confident and capable. As if there’s a primal hunter-gatherer in me that needs to look out for you, which means I have to push past my own issues and be strong. The entire process feels so nice, it’s hard to describe. But anyway, I don’t mind goin’ out like that if you’re with me. How do you feel about it?”

“I haven’t had a meal in a restaurant in…longer than I even remember.” Lucas smiled. “I would love to, Will. Should we walk or drive, my brave hunter-gatherer?”

“In keeping with the theme,” Will grinned, “And since the weather’s a lot nicer today, we could walk if you like. Get some fresh air. The woods are always real pretty after a cold snap fades into a little tug of Spring tryin’ to break through.”

“I’d very much like to take a walk with you.”

Will leaned up a bit and kissed the remaining tears from his lover’s flushed, warm face. “Then it’s settled, handsome.”

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Getting ready was a simple matter, especially since they were so hungry and deeply looking forward to the day ahead. Will tried to lend Lucas a pair of his jeans, bursting into laughter when the older man couldn't get them up over his hips.

"You're so big and strong, baby," he praised as Lucas blushed and cursed under his breath. "I love y– *ahem,* I love your body just the way it is," Will said, catching himself just in time. "Please don't ever change."

Will didn't know why he was so careful to keep stemming the flow of his growing obsession. Lucas seemed to be falling as fast as he was, but Lucas was…normal. Sane. Will didn't trust himself to be anything like that, and he wasn't going to frighten this sweet man away by getting too intense the morning after the day they met.

His recovery had been fumbled, but Lucas was more focused on the compliments to his body.

"If you like me the way I am," Lucas nodded, pulling on a pair of Will's gray sweatpants with much better results, "Then I will never change, I promise."

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The small town square, constituting a country general store, auto repair shop, gas station, church and police station, was an easy walk through a straight, well-trodden path. It was actually just on the other side of the docks where they'd met.

Will took Lucas' hand in his own as they set off, and there they were like a couple, both turning rosy in the face. Grinning over at his lover, Will said, "It's nice that we don't need hats and gloves today."

"It is nice," Lucas agreed.

But he looked slightly apprehensive, maybe less so than yesterday's walk through the woods, when he'd had the slippery ground to watch out for. He glanced around when Will commented on how pretty the forest was, but then his glances turned into little darting, frantic ones. As if Lucas was used to subduing this particular anxiety, whatever it was.

"Lucas, what's up?" Will squeezed his hand and gave it a kiss. "You seem kind of nervous."

"It's the woods," Lucas sighed, forcing a smile. "Part of why I moved here was to isolate myself – because being around people had become… unhealthy for me…and part of it was to challenge myself. For example, I used to hunt deer, it was an old tradition in my family, one I even passed down to my son. But I can't stand the thought of it anymore, the guns, the frightened, lovely animals. So elegant and innocent. Truth be told, I've never shot one, though I'm an excellent shot."

"I bet you are."

"I prefer tin cans," Lucas shrugged. "So, since I can't go hunting anymore, which mostly was for the time with my friends, back when I had them, eh. I could try something similar but less harmful or making me anxious, if it makes sense?"

“It makes…a lot of sense.” Will gave him an encouraging, gentle smile.

“I started fishing for those reasons. It was like hunting but a little milder. Then, you know, it was still too much like, and it was hard for me to focus. Uhh, unfortunate, I…um, well, back home in my town, something scary happened to me in the woods where I used to hunt with my friends. Since then…I’m always on full attention when I’m in this sort of place.”

Will wanted to kiss his small lapses in English language comprehension and the little furrow between his brows when he translated in his mind and figured out how to communicate a certain thought to Will.

As much as he was smiling over at Lucas with these sentimental thoughts, Will felt another one of his darker storm clouds passing over his heart.

“I don’t like the sound of that one bit, honey.” Will glanced at him with a quiet urgency. “Whatever scared you that time, is it something you’re safe from now, or something – maybe someone – I need to know about? I’ll protect you, Lucas, you have my word.”

“You’re sweet,” Lucas smiled, the darkness in his own eyes fleeing, healed by Will’s affectionate solicitude. “But it’s all okay now. I don’t even know if what I thought I saw was real. Those were tough days for me, and I could’ve imagined it.”

“But it doesn’t seem like you to imagine seeing anything. Did you hear anyone? When you felt threatened out in the woods?”

“I heard something.” Lucas shivered. “But I think it was just a mistake.”

“Hold on,” Will stopped short. “How can you know for sure? Maybe you’d better tell me exactly what happened.”

“Will…let’s go have our breakfast and enjoy the day. If you still want to spend time with me later, we could find a quiet moment. I am starting to think we will have to tell each other our sad stories, or we’ll both keep feeling nervous and…paranoia?”

“Mmhm. Paranoid. You’re right about everything, no surprise.” Will sighed and they started walking along more cheerfully again. “You’re so good at talking me down when I start to feel a little out of control.”

“It’s no trouble at all.” Lucas’ warm smile and cinnamon-sweet gaze comprised Will’s whole world in that moment.

A moment later he thought how cold those same eyes could look in someone else’s face. Sometimes red or nearly black, with that detached void of sympathy.

Hannibal could soothe Will, and he was even good at it, too. But he’d always preferred tough love, pushing Will past his limits. The harsh, startling, erotic liberation of those times still held its heady appeal in Will’s memory palace.

Will, meanwhile, was getting better at letting the Hannibal-thoughts and flashbacks slink into the shadows of his mind so he could be present. That process would never be completely

successful.

“It’s more better out here, anyway,” Lucas explained innocently, without a clue how dark it got in Will’s head. “The woods are lovelier. The little animals are cuter, too.”

Will chuckled, “Yeah, the bunnies and squirrels, soon they’ll be out in full force. Temp just has to move up to around sixty and out they run. Don’t ever feed them, they’ll never leave you alone.”

“Oh, but I’m the same way,” Lucas joked. “Are you sure you want to keep feeding me?”

“I have to make an exception for you, because you’re cuter than all the rest.”

They both grinned.

The air was crisp and fresh, and there were little, tiny buds barely starting to form on the long, skinny limbs of certain trees. A few squirrels were brave enough to pop their heads out from their homes inside those trees, disappointed when Will and Lucas apparently weren’t there to feed them.

A bend in the road brought them to the gravel path which they followed past the water, docks and boats.

“I’m starting to feel downright nostalgic about that dock over there,” Will confessed.

“So am I,” Lucas agreed, and he slid each of his fingers between Will’s, right where they belonged.

Right up the road was the general store. Outside, a white sign with those black letters you could stick on and change whenever you wanted declared: *“Bre fa t Special $6 $9”*

“One less letter and it would be ‘be fat,’” Lucas observed, making them both chuckle. “But that only means the food must be good.”

“It has a great reputation. I don’t usually talk much to these folks, but I’m a good listener.” Will held the door open for Lucas as they entered the quaint, rustic building.

It was petite in its square shape in front, but the place extended back a ways, enough to host a well-stocked grocery section with farmer’s market produce and a diner-style counter in the back with several tables.

Will kept Lucas’ hand in his as he weaved through the chatty, mostly smiling collection of townspeople, none of whose names he knew if he ever had known them. Since arriving in Maine, Lucas was the first person Will saw who was worth looking at.

He could tell a bunch of people were staring at them and gossiping under their breaths, and it made him feel smug and proud. While he hadn’t bothered to get to know them, it seemed that he and Lucas had separately garnered their attention (Will for his notoriety and being “that scary type of good-looking”) and Lucas for being a handsome “poor dear, he deserves to find somebody to keep him company.”)

But when they were rooting for Lucas' love life (or hoping he'd come out more often so they could try and keep him company), this surely was not what they had in mind: the shy Danish man on a date with that "*boy who got off for multiple murders, but we can't know for sure he wasn't guilty. Or otherwise, how in the Sam Hill did he get arrested in the first place?*"

Although Will resented their hurtful comments and lack of plain common sense, he liked sticking it to them this way, showing off the man on his arm with a proud claim. He knew Lucas was too good for him, but since Lucas disagreed, well, all these no-name talking heads could fuck off. He hoped they were green with jealousy and/or thoroughly scandalized.

"That wasn't so bad," Lucas whispered with a playful smile when they sat down.

"I know, it really wasn't. Let's see how this goes." Will gave him a conspiratorial smile as they continued their secret operation: to go out among the public as traumatized introverts and remain unscathed, perhaps even enjoy themselves.

It went great. They both had the lumberjack special, coffee and orange juice, and the food really was fantastic. Midway through the meal, Will said excitedly, "Hey, I bet there's a ton of things we can finally do that involve going out. Now that we have each other to go out with."

Lucas swallowed a sip of juice as his face lit up. "You're right! Here, let's make a list."

He flipped a paper placemat over to the blank side and grabbed a pencil over by the stack of Keno cards.

"Grocery store - check
Restaurant - check
Let's see…oh! One of those big box store like Target." Lucas jotted it down with a grimace at the mere mention.

"Yes, definitely," Will affirmed. "Um, anything official, where you have no choice and the people there have no cause to be nice to you? Doctor's offices, banks, walk-in bill payment centers, post offices, libraries, malls, the dentist. Wow, you have beautiful handwriting."

"Thank you. Well, this is a fine assortment to begin with. I don't know how many of these we even want to do, but perhaps we could if we did want. What about movie theaters?"

"I consider them generally okay, if a bit of a risk," Will assessed thoughtfully. "As long as I can get from the ticket seller's counter into the dark anonymity of the theater itself, and sneak out the back exit when the movie's done, it's one of the few activities I've been up for lately."

"You have some strong points. But I was afraid of the ticket counter workers."

Will nodded. "I don't blame you! What do they *want,* you know? They make you repeat the name of the movie loudly, and then they look at you with judgment for whatever, who even knows. I'll protect you from them, darlin.'"

"Their rudeness doesn't stand a chance against you," Lucas grinned.

Oh, the irony…

Because just then, Will glanced up at the wrong moment and saw the news playing on a small tv mounted on the wall behind them. Lucas had his back to it, and Will wanted it to stay that way.

Another Freddie Lounds exclusive interview was airing soon, and an ad for it flashed across the screen. There were a few quick shots of Hannibal: first as his dignified former person suit "self," pristine in his three-piece, then an artist's rendition from court which showed Hannibal committing grisly murder with a nonchalant expression. Finally, a shot of Hannibal being led in cuffs, chains and a face mask into the BSHCI knowing he might never walk out again.

It was a one-two-three series of unexpected bullets to the heart that Will couldn't tear his eyes from or withstand casually. Another ad came on and he snapped out of it, unable to shake the feelings of guilt and longing. This sophisticated, worldly man who adored travel, art, the finer things…because of Will, he languished in self-imposed exile. He knew damn well Hannibal deserved to be behind bars for life, so why did it hurt Will so much?

"You alright, *skat?*" Lucas' turn to meet Will's mysterious anxiety with concern. "Something on t.v.?"

"It was, but it's gone now," Will sighed. He did his best smile, knowing it would go back to being real within a few minutes because that was The Lucas Effect.

"Hey," he added before Lucas' concern had a chance to grow. "You ever accidentally take someone else's cart in the store because you're drifting off on brain tangent clouds and stopped paying attention to anything?"

"A few times," Lucas laughed, "It's dreadful. People act as if you just stole their wallet and car keys out of their hands. It's just an honest mistake."

"That's the thing, we aren't allowed to have those because we got labeled 'Different' and 'Outsiders.'" Will shrugged. "I kinda like being a Different Outsider, though. The other word I hear a lot is 'Difficult.'"

"We can be that together. The Difficult Outsiders. We can call our new band that."

Will almost choked on his coffee laughing. "No, no way. I play a little piano and guitar, but I am nowhere near performance level. How about you?"

"I used to do karaoke in Denmark," Lucas said, as if proudly boasting.

"Now, that, I would love to see," Will grinned.

"Only if you play guitar for me sometime." Lucas gave Will that one smile that could not possibly be resisted.

"Awww…" his heart made it through the jolt of pain over Hannibal. He leaned across the table and pressed a sweet kiss to Lucas' lips. "You got it, baby."

The waitress called them “lovebirds” and slapped the check down with more bland business than judgment.

“I got this, too,” Will insisted as Lucas tried to pay.

He’d brought his wallet when fishing yesterday and apparently stuffed it in his coat pocket before they left.

“I know you said you like taking care of me, promise I’m not gonna cry again, but a gentleman is supposed to pay for his date’s meals, at least sometimes.”

Will feigned a serious face. “Really? How much you got, let me see your wallet.”

Lucas would have given him the deed to his house or his soul for that matter; he passed the wallet over without even asking why.

“Look at your cute license photo!” Will cooed, giving it a small kiss over the clear plastic holding it in place.

Then, he put Lucas’ wallet in his own pocket and slipped his credit card on top of the bill. The waitress picked it up the next time she zoomed by.

“You’re so unbelievable.” Lucas couldn’t even pretend to be frustrated or mad.

He was blushing and trembling a little, eyes shining with pure joy, enough of it that it felt scary. Not scary like the woods back home. A fear of not knowing how to hold so much happiness in a heart, a terror of losing it. Will knew, since he felt the same.

“You’ll have to be a lot quicker than that if you wanna stop me from spoiling you, sweetheart.” Will raised his eyebrows with a mischievous smirk.

They walked out with Will’s arm wrapped snugly around Lucas’ waist, even more P.D.A. than their grand entrance onto the extremely limited town social scene.

Out on the front deck of the store, Will sat down on a wooden swing and patted the place beside him.

“Lucas, I think we both know that…like we said earlier, we won’t be able to get much further along without knowin’ what the hell happened to each of us in the past.” Will really was serious, this time.

But he still held Lucas’ hand with a smile and nudged his boot against Lucas’.

“Okay. Maybe later, if it feels natural? And not here,” Lucas suggested.

“Certainly not here. I was going to go out on a limb and ask if you want to come home with me. We’d have plenty of time to talk and do not-talking as much as we like.”

Lucas ruffled Will’s curls. “I’m shocked, Will Graham. Inviting me over two nights in a row? Whatever will the people say?”

“They’ll probably say we’re in love,” Will winked, as Lucas’ cheeks turned rosy red. “But let’s keep ‘em guessin’ for now.”

“I should go to my house and get some of my stuff first,” Lucas suggested. “You want to see my house?”

“You bet I do! Even if I keep trying to tempt you out of it…”

“You have the dogs, Will, so it only makes sense to stay at your house. If you want me to stay over…”

“At this point, the ‘if you want’ and ‘if it’s okay with you’ stuff is an inside joke between us.” Will giggled. “I’d take you home and keep you forever if I could.”

Something shifted in Lucas’ expression, from fond conversation to deep tenderness. He moved closer to Will and kissed him, holding Will’s face in one hand. Their warm mouths felt even more so with the crisp, cool air of the day, and time seemed to slow down.

“I really, really more than like you,” Lucas admitted, keeping his face nuzzled close to Will’s when they broke the kiss off for the sake of common decency. “A lot.”

“I more than like you so much.” Will kissed him again, sighing against his lips, “So much.”

Chapter End Notes

When he was crying in Will's arms, Lucas said "Hundrede hjerter ville være for få til at bære al min kærlighed til dig," "A hundred hearts would be too few to carry all my love for you." ❤️🥺

Next time: As their unbreakable bond flourishes, Lucas and Will find out about each others' pasts, with highly emotional reactions. Will is going to find it hard to resist his desire to hunt down Lucas' antagonizers, attackers and life-ruiners in Denmark. And from his cell, Hannibal is going to find out about Will's recent activities...

A swan dive into shark-infested waters

Chapter Notes

cw: brief mention of a dog death as seen in *The Hunt*; some description of graphic violence (towards humans).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 4: A swan dive into shark-infested waters

“I need you so badly
'Cause life is a bad dream
So if lovin' you kills me
Yeah, I would die happy”
-Zolita

***

They walked through the woods, taking their time. Lucas could use his own car to bring some stuff over to Will’s.

“Sorry for the extra stop,” Lucas said, pressing his glasses to the bridge of his nose. “But I have to get back to teaching on Monday, so I need my laptop. I also need my own clothes, since you have the waist of a ballet dancer.”

“Ha! Only compared to you, stallion.” Will threw an arm around Lucas’ middle and squeezed affectionately. “I don’t mind stopping at your house. I’m dying to see where you’ve been living…uh, I mean, where you live. But you know what, darlin’? Even if I didn’t particularly feel like going along, I’d go anyway. Because whatever I’d do without you pales next to the most mundane task when I’m here. By your side. Nothin’ I do for you is ever gonna be a hassle.”

“You say that now,” Lucas sighed, still wearing a well-broken-in smile which served as a general apology for all of his flaws. “I’ve already been so needy with you, I’m a little afraid that will only get worse with time.”

“Promise?” Will asked, halting Lucas with a tug of his coat that brought their lips together. “I like you needy. It turns me on,” he said thickly between kisses. “Makes me know you’re mine. If there’s anything you want, you name it, you got it. It’s like that, okay? I’m just so happy with you, baby.”

“Me, too, skat.” Lucas kissed Will again more softly, then took his hand as they got closer to his own little, rustic house a few miles on from Will’s.

“When we’re together and you feel so happy, do you stop thinking…of him?” Lucas asked after a delicate silence had filled several minutes.

Will had known he was going to come out with something serious by the look on his face and how he went quiet. Well, they were going to have to confront this at some point, and Will was determined to remain truthful, no matter what.

“That’s a complicated question, honey. I hope you haven’t been lettin’ the resemblance thing get to you.” Will glanced at him in concern, noting that his lover’s pensive profile was not pained at all, thank goodness.

“I know that whoever you…well. The one who looks like me. I know you felt more for him than I’ve felt with anyone I have been with romantically. I think he still means a lot to you.”

“In a way. It’s like…I’m here with you, and there’s no place I’d rather be. But he’s just…a river running through me. Time will pass, I could do so many things and have a great life. The river won’t run dry though, not ever.”

Lucas nodded. “Does he run through your veins?”

“He’s not the only one. Can you…does it upset you that I…”

“Will, I don’t need to own you. We barely…we only just started…”

“C’mon Lucas, we aren’t little kids anymore; we aren’t even young adults. We both know this is already very serious and real. If you needed me to somehow cut him out of me, I guess I owe it to you to admit I can’t. I’m sorry about it. Guess you could see it as my Achilles’ heel, or a benign, yet incurable growth of something wicked inside me.”

Lucas stopped walking. “Benign, but wicked?”

Will laughed with a sad ache which he knew very well, but had no words for. He missed Hannibal as if some vital part of him had been excised in a cruel and unconvincing, sanitary manner.

“It’s this one,” said Lucas quietly, clearing his throat.

He opened a neat, tan picket fence and walked through a small but equally neat yard before taking his keys out and inserting one into the front door of the only house around for miles.

Normally, Will would be charmed and amused that Lucas’ nerves made him insert random comments where none were needed. But this wasn’t one of the funny or cute times. Well… Lucas was *always* cute, actually. And Will always didn’t deserve him one bit.

“This is a gorgeous place,” Will ventured, trailing his lover into the quaint, yet immaculate stone cottage.

Lucas had fished a few letters from the mailbox and now flipped through them blandly, keeping his eyes down, away from Will's.

"I got quite a good price for renting it because of the tiny size and remote location. At the time it was just what I needed, funny enough."

"Maybe. Maybe I felt the same." Will hooked his hands into his jeans' pockets with a shrug.

Lucas finally glanced up. His arms were braced tensely on the kitchen counter as an enigmatic flicker of dread in his amber gaze shot through Will like a bullet.

"Maybe something's expanding now for us both."

"Nothing much here," Lucas said to the envelopes on the clean counter where the only other items were a coffee machine and toaster. "Bill."

He tossed that one aside. "Offer to get some more debt going while I'm at it," he continued tartly. After throwing that letter in the same haphazard direction as its predecessor, he repeated the same pattern until he'd gone through all six envelopes and seemed to be at a loss.

Will lingered in the front room, which had a comfy couch and a medium-sized tv, old-school, no flatscreen. There was an Ikea desk with notebooks and pens of all different colors, and a small bookcase which was only half-full. Without pictures or art on the walls, the place seemed half-moved-into, representing a half-life. As if Lucas had resided in these walls as a ghost of his former self.

"I'll give you the tour before I pack." Lucas resumed stiffly.

"Oh, Lucas." Will didn't mean for his eyes to go large and shimmer with an extra-bright blue shade, but all the same it clearly impacted Lucas.

His boyfriend bit his lip and groaned, then went to say something, but stopped again. The silence which elapsed was of a type they'd never shared and which Will did not want to last a second longer than necessary.

Lucas finally came up with a wan "The tour can start in the den sort of room I guess."

The older man headed to his lover and Will met him in the middle, wrapping arms around Lucas' waist with a penitent sigh.

Trying desperately to be honest about Hannibal but make his deep feelings for Lucas known, Will confessed, "I don't want to be alone anymore if there's you in the world. And what I'm here in your life to do is make you happy, regardless of my past. If I promise to treat you good, with all of my heart, does it matter about who got here first? I'm capable of loving more than one person. Does that sound selfish and twisted?"

"No, darling." Lucas squeezed Will and kissed the top of his head. "I'm being selfish and silly. How can I blame you for problems and feelings that came from trauma? I have to be a

better person than that, especially towards you. How cruel and ungrateful. Don't know what's wrong with me…"

"What? Because you got jealous?" Will pulled back slightly and looked up at Lucas' face in surprise and something like reprimand. "Baby, do you know how fucking jealous I am of your ex-wife and ex-girlfriend?"

Lucas laughed meekly. "But I don't even like either one of them anymore."

"Yeah, but you used to. And they had you." Will kissed his mouth slowly, romantically.

The amorous, soft and warm movements of lips and tongue calmed and excited them both, reminding them of the rush they gave one another so easily.

"Nobody ever had me like this." Lucas pressed their brows together. His glasses immediately made an attempt to escape his face, sliding down his nose to collide with Will's. "That's going to keep happening."

"Yup." Will smirked and gave Lucas' ass a swift little slap. "The sound of our glasses clinking together is a happy one to me. And I'll always be jealous of anyone you slept with, even anyone you were attracted to, past or present. If that isn't sane, then…I'm not. Which is actually kind of likely."

He chewed his lip and sat in Lucas' desk chair. "Uhh…" he cupped his stubbled chin and gave a nervous laugh of his own. "I guess on the bright side, my possible instability means I'll never judge you for being jealous."

"You're saner than most so-called sane people I know." Lucas chuckled, sitting on the couch as he gazed over at Will. The younger man in the soft flannel and faded jeans seemed to be a god-like presence for him; his expression conveyed an ethereal admiration.

Will blushed at the love-struck look and mused, "I do have common sense and an iron resolve when I make my mind up about something important. That's why my ex-sort-of-person is far away and I never go visit him. Never write, email, text or call. I have decided to cut him out of my life, and to move on. Now, I would love to move on with you, but that's asking a lot, all things considered. I think once you hear the whole story, you can make a better judgment about me."

"And what do you expect that judgment to be?" Lucas raised his eyebrows and folded his hands on his lap.

Gray sweatpants had surely never looked so good, clinging to his thick thighs and showing off his long legs. Will had also been checking his perfect, round ass out all day.

"I expect you'll know – in a much better-informed and balanced manner – whether you wish to let me continue courting you." Will's face reddened as he realized he was speaking like Mr. fucking Darcy.

"*Courting* me?" Lucas laid a hand on his chest. "Little old me? Why, Mr. Graham. Does this mean you're planning to escort me to the next ball in town?"

"It damn sure does, if you'll have me." Will went over to Lucas and sank into his lap, straddling him with hands dangled over the older man's neck. "Although the closest thing our 'society' has to a ball is that ancient-looking country-western bar. I think they have line dancing on Friday nights."

"I can do without." Lucas grimaced comically and Will kissed him through the laughter. "But I cannot do without you, dear Will."

His tone had shifted from gentle humor to tender devotion now. "I won't, unless you turn me away. You can tell me you'll always love and miss him. You can hit me and hurt me, neglect me, tell me you committed the most horrible crimes, steal all my money, cheat on me, even. I won't ever stop wanting to be right here with you in my arms. I can't."

"I would never hurt you, honey," Will sighed, cupping his face and kissing him softly all over it.

"I know. I'm just…I couldn't quite think about another way to say what the words…uh, because English is still on a learning curve. That's the best way I know how to put it. You don't have to worry about pushing me away; you would have to have some kind of special potion that undoes superglue."

"Goddammit," Will grumbled playfully. "I just ran out of the superglue undoer. Looks like we're stuck with each other."

"Mmm. Good." Lucas hugged him close and kissed his neck, tickling Will's sensitive skin with his stubble. His five o'clock shadow kept brushing over the love bites, making Will so aroused his toes curled in his boots.

"Then it's settled," Will said, shaking off the instant horniness and focusing on the rather essential talk they were having. "I think we can both comfortably explain our pasts without worrying that either will abandon the other. Our minds and hearts won't change; we know who we are, and who we want to be for one another, right?"

"Yes. But can you handle the hardest truths, Will? I'm…a scrapbooker."

"No! That's terrible. How could you? Let's call the whole thing off." Will ruffled his hair. "You make scrapbooks?"

"I took it up as a hobby when I moved here. It's supposed to be therapeutic and provide a creative outlet. I'm quoting one of my five hundred therapists."

"Can I see your scrapbook?" Will grinned. "I'd love to. That's so sweet and so you."

"I'll show it to you later." Lucas stood with Will still wrapped around him and laugh-groaned when the younger man nibbled his ear. "Will. We'll never get anything done here at this rate."

“That’s not true, we’ll get plenty done.” Will continued his teasing until he got himself pressed against the wall, which was getting to be something of a talent of his. “I promise,” he said breathily, moaning at Lucas’ hot kisses on his lips, cheeks, jaw and neck, “To help you get packed up and moved in, as soon as we’re finished with this –”

“You’d better.” He didn’t speak English again for a while after that.

Lucas finally “broke in” a few rooms of his little rented home, on the day he was leaving it for the foreseeable future.

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It took a couple of hours to get Lucas’ essentials packed up, and by then they were famished. Will suggested a late lunch in town, where they discovered that the “line dancing” bar made great pulled pork and coleslaw, along with being entirely safe (from the line dancing) during the quiet, daytime hours.

As they were leaving, walking across the small lot to Lucas’ car, they passed an elderly couple. The lady’s cheerful face changed when she saw Lucas, as if she was slightly afraid of him. Will instantly registered the uncomfortable way this hit Lucas, calling up whatever had him already feeling that people hated him. A second later, he understood what happened and had to clarify, so Lucas didn’t leave thinking that some of the townsfolk despised him on some kind of instinctive principle.

“Excuse me, ma’am?” Will said kindly, making sure his posture was relaxed and unthreatening.

He was a tiny bit angry, but it wasn’t really the woman’s fault she’d confused Lucas with Hannibal. It was one of the few things in the world that weren’t anyone’s fault.

“Yes, dear?” The lady patted her pure white bob nervously, clutching her husband’s hand. For his part, her spouse looked confused as to what was going on.

“It’s just that I saw you tense up when me and my partner walked by, and that’s understandable. But, I want you to know this isn’t the man from the news. This is Lucas. He recently moved here from Denmark. He’s a teacher and the most gentle, harmless man I know.”

“Will? What man from the news?” Lucas inquired, calming down but now baffled instead of anxious and triggered.

“My dear boy, I’m dreadfully sorry for mixing you up with that wretched murderer Freddie Lounds is always going on about. That awful Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal the Cannibal.” The lady examined Lucas’ face again. “It is a powerful likeness, though, isn’t it, Phillip?”

Phillip squinted at Lucas’ whiskey-colored eyes, soft silver-blonde hair and high cheekbones, not to mention his innocent demeanor.

“I don’t even know what you’re talking about, Lynn, you know I hate that damn Freddie Lounds. Her voice makes me go outside to shovel the snow even if there isn’t any, wait forty minutes or so for her to shut up before I come in.” Phillip chortled, adjusting his suspenders over a plaid work shirt similar to, but a bit heavier than Will’s own. “What’s that got to do with this nice teacher fella?”

“I’ll tell you inside, Phillip.” Speaking through gritted teeth, Lynn rolled her eyes. “Let’s mosey on. I had no idea you were quite this out of touch with current events. Really. C’mon, before you gawk your way past happy hour appetizers.”

When they had gone, Lucas laughed and shook his head. “They’re a pair of characters, aren’t they?”

“That’s the first question you have for me, really? Nothing about the whole…” Will whispered, “Murderer thing?”

“Not here, not right now.” Lucas looked miraculously unscathed. “I’m obviously alarmed, confused and very worried about that, but at the moment I just want to take a picture with you.”

Will stared at his lover’s handsome face, happy smile and glow of contentment. The day had grown colder as the sun dipped lower and evening approached. Lucas’ cheeks were flushed from the new chill, like his own were, but Will never felt so warm as he did then.

“Why do you suddenly want…? I mean sure, of course,” Will chuckled, shocked that Lucas did not have an – understandably – more extreme reaction to hearing even the hint of Hannibal Lecter’s existence.

“I thought I was clear that nothing would chase me away from you, Will Graham.” Lucas stood beside Will, held his phone up with the angling of someone who barely knew how to take a selfie, and captured the two goofy smiles.

That the image was a bit crooked made it even more precious. Will kissed Lucas’ cheek when he took a few more candids, and then the older man grew bolder, snapping a photo of them kissing on the lips, right there in the parking lot.

“Wonderful,” Lucas enthused as they finally returned to his (of course) station wagon. “You can put those photos of us on your Facebook later. Tag your amazing new lover and announce our happiness, but please make sure you tell my name. That should stop any confusion with this murderer fellow.”

Lucas held the passenger side door open, his eyes twinkling. Will snorted a laugh as he got into the car. “I don’t have a Facebook.”

“Of course you don’t.” Lucas was breezily amused as he fastened his seatbelt and started the car up.

“Do you?” Will asked, ready to be shocked for the second time in ten minutes if so.

“No,” Lucas said, giving his best poker face until Will’s expression of accusing amusement melted him down. “We could start one together. And make it clear that we won’t be socializing. Only posting photos of our beautiful new love so that others can drown in their envy.”

“It’s a social network. Ahhh, I see. How subversive.” Will grinned as Lucas waggled his eyebrows with faux villainous flair. “I love how your mind works, you adorable little anarchist.”

***

At home, they spent time with the dogs, who were merrily growing accustomed to having one more owner.

“They can tell that you’re making me happy, you know.” Will smiled over his shoulder at Lucas, who sat on the porch steps, fiddling with the adjustment and filter settings on his phone’s photo album.

Lucas looked up, his glasses slightly fogged with cold. He set them on top of his head and laughed happily as Buster approached, nudging at his leg and yipping.

“Okay, okay…” He stood and helped Buster practice a series of tricks, performed at Lucas’ simple command. “There you go, fantastic, little guy!”

How could the dogs not pick up on the infectious joy between the new couple? Buster was dashing around in prideful circles after completing the tricks and earning a treat. Of course, that meant everyone else had to have a treat as well, or they’d fuss, Will reasoned.

“I don’t want anyone getting an inferiority complex.” He winked as Lucas reached his hand into the bag of treats, distributing them to seven eager dogs.

“I would have done anyway, given them all treats, I mean,” Lucas admitted. “They’re such amazing dogs, I can’t play favorites. I used to spoil my dog Fanny a little, too. She’s the one I first taught those tricks to, years ago. Smart girl.”

“Wish I could’ve met her before she passed.” Will gave Lucas a side hug as they watched the dogs scampering around the yard for a little while. He knew what it was like to love a dog in this special way, and it was nice to talk with someone who really got that, too.

“She would have loved you way too much, the little show-off.” Lucas’ laugh was a bit hollow this time, as if he still grieved for Fanny.

“Buster already likes you better than me.” Will smirked.

They felt every inch the real couple they had suddenly fallen into becoming, standing in their yard, watching the dogs. The two men’s arms around each other, trust and affection resonating as naturally as they breathed.

“I wasn’t going to make a big deal out of that.” Lucas bumped their hips and Will made a deft move towards his ticklish stomach. “Ah – not that! You’re a terror.”

Will stopped short. “It was an empty threat, baby,” he giggled, hugging Lucas instead, burying his face in the older man’s chest. He felt the strength and complete, innocent dependence of Lucas, the warm, firm body against him, drawing him even closer.

At some point, was Lucas going to find out that Will really *was* a terror?

***

Will made them hot cocoa with vodka and chocolate liquor in it, grateful for the impulse buy a few weeks ago. He figured that this treat ought to help the conversation feel more relaxed and cozy. But then again, Lucas seemed to be that already. He waited for Will on the couch by the wood stove where the dogs were peacefully curled up on their cushions, exhausted after a good, long play outside and a solid dinner.

“What?” Lucas asked, batting at his own face when Will returned with the two large mugs, but stopped to look at Lucas intently for a few moments. “Do I have something on my face?”

“Not yet.” Will gave him a wicked smile, then sat down, passed Lucas his mug, and swiped some whipped cream from his own, dabbing it on Lucas’ mouth.

“Oh, no it seems I’m a mess all of a sudden.” Lucas didn’t lick the cream off, instead leaning in delightedly when Will kissed it away.

“Sometimes I come into a room and you’re just…in it. Here with me. This all happened so fast, and it feels like a *good* kind of crazy I never knew about. I only knew the bad crazy.” He blew on Lucas’ cocoa with a nurturing smile. “Careful, love. Don’t burn your tongue, now.”

“Will,” Lucas began steadily. He put his mug down to cool off and turned back to face his lover, taking Will’s trembling hands in his own larger ones. “We’ve both been caught in the bad crazy for years. How could anyone understand better what we’ve been through? You don’t have to be this nervous. I already have a pretty good idea what you might be about to tell me.”

“I’ll try to calm down.” Will kissed Lucas’ hand. “Funny enough, I thought I was going to look after you and make sure you were okay, yet it’s already going the opposite direction. But let me just start here…Hannibal is the reason I didn’t have anyone left in my life until we met.”

“Hannibal…Lecter.” Lucas repeated the name he’d heard in town, slowly learning the way it formed and felt in his mouth.

“Right.”

Will curled up to Lucas’ side, tucking his legs under himself to stave off another wave of anxiety.

“Did he chase everyone out of your life?” Lucas’ brow furrowed as his cheer changed to deep concern.

“That’s the way he liked it, you see. For me not to have anyone in his life that wasn’t him. Although, bizarrely, he tried to take *me* out of my life, too. He had some real decision-making problems.”

Lucas took a deep breath, ran his fingers through Will’s curls, and then clasped his cheek, not knowing he was unconsciously mirroring Hannibal’s body language right before he’d stabbed Will in the kitchen, three years ago.

“How did he try to take you out of your life?” He could not speak above a whisper. Protective fervor had tensed his body, while at the same time he remained a loyal rock to cling to. True to his word, Lucas would not turn away from Will, Hannibal “The Cannibal” Lecter or not.

Will took Lucas’ hand gently and guided it to the front of his hair, where his curls had fallen over his brow. The older man lifted the mussed curls, sweeping them back to reveal the angry red line on Will’s skin.

“He did that to you.” Lucas frowned, tears shining in his eyes.

But he made no attempt to make this conversation about him instead of Will. He remained entirely focused on being there, listening sensitively and helping in any way he could.

“My Will…” Lucas’ voice shuddered and he kissed the scar reverently. “I’m so sorry. Wait. Did he give you the…”

He leaned back, and Will lifted his shirt. “Yes. We had the equivalent of a bad breakup a few years ago, in his Baltimore home. He left me and ran off to Europe with a sleazy, ice-queen blonde. But not before leaving me with this smile.”

“How can you still be thinking about him with no hate?” Lucas kissed the belly scar, feeling the harsh ridge, unable to imagine how badly it must have hurt to be cut this way. “He did worse than abuse you.”

“I know. It’s just that…” Will held Lucas’ face against his stomach, stroking his silky hair. “It sort of ate its own tail. I retaliated, trying to get revenge for him ruining my life the first time. Then he’d retaliate to my retaliation. We finally called it a Zero Sum Game, right before he turned himself in to the FBI.”

“Wait, he was a killer who framed you for…his own crimes, was it?” Lucas wasn’t only grieved now, or protective. On top of hearty servings of those feelings, Will could feel anger roiling off him. It was especially noticeable because from what he’d seen, Lucas didn’t ordinarily have a temper.

“Yeah. He was a dick, I won’t deny that.”

“I hope not!” Lucas stared at him, aghast. “Darling, you mustn’t blame yourself or try to forgive such a horrible man. I wish he never got anywhere near your precious heart.”

“That’s okay. I wouldn’t be this self that you’re with now if I never met him. Hannibal could see through my disguise from the beginning. He knew somehow that there was a darkness in

me, that my whole life was an anguished ordeal of keeping it down, hating myself. And…he took it upon himself to free me, in his own unique manner."

Lucas sat up straight, gazing sadly at Will. "You use such mild words to describe things I can't believe you survived. And I really look that much like your Hannibal?"

"He isn't *my* Hannibal, he's an incarcerated, cannibalistic serial killer who I'm pretty sure is obsessed with me. Who, for a long time, I was obsessed with, too." He paused as Lucas' mouth dropped open. "Yes, you aren't dead ringers or anything but it's more than a passing resemblance."

Will caressed Lucas' face. "Now you see why I'm ashamed of my past and the way some part of me still feels for him?" Will shook his head. "You ought to know I'm not just damaged goods. I'm corrupted. He pulled something out of me that should have remained under lock and key forever."

"And now you can't put it back? This darkness?" Lucas held Will to his chest, letting the younger man see that he still wasn't fazed in the least by the confession. "Does it make you do things?"

"No, thank God." Will traced a finger over Lucas' t-shirt, listening to his lover's reassuring heartbeat. It wasn't fast, panicking. It was solid, steady and present. "It makes me feel things. But I leave it at that. Or at least, so far I've controlled it. Maybe I just haven't met anyone who made me mad enough to go fully free, I genuinely don't know."

"You're incredibly strong, skat. Please, if you don't mind, tell me more about what happened?"

Will clung to Lucas' shirt, nodded and let a few tears seep into the cotton underneath his cheek. "Alright."

***

The Hannibal Saga took ages to unfold in entirety, especially because Lucas kept making him stop every time something either horrific, unbelievable or both occurred.

"Wait," Lucas said with a jolt when Will was almost done recounting the adventures of the wayward profiler and his feral cannibal. "Mason Verger? Sent men to kidnap you both when you were in the middle of…a worse breakup?"

"Yes, that's very much Verger's style, or was. Before escaping from the Verger farm where we were held prisoner, Hannibal helped feed Mason to some eels under the floor."

"Will, did you put something in this hot cocoa?" Lucas had yet to recover from the *last* ghastly and incredibly weird event in the story.

"Just cocoa and vodka. The rest is the hallucinogenic quality of my past life narrative. Anyway, after that, Hannibal carried me home. I said I didn't want to see him anymore. I thought he left, ran away again before Jack and the feds showed up."

“Sure. That’s what he’s good at, after all, running away from his problems, leaving you to deal with them.” Lucas glared as if Hannibal stood before him.

“He used to be. Seems the whole…everything…we had been through together finally wised him up. A little. After all, he turned himself in because I tried to get out of knowing where he was and what he was doing. It was the ultimate manipulation.”

“What was it like for you?”

“Seven different shades of guilty and conflicted.” Will finished his last sip with a grateful nod to the slight looseness which the spiked drink gave his mood. “Guilty that he was in there because of me, guilty that I felt so much for him and wished he was still free, which is an unforgivable thought.”

“It isn’t. I understand. I forgive you. Wish you’d forgive yourself.” Lucas massaged Will’s neck and shoulders lovingly.

“Having a unique bond with someone doesn’t mean that you’re actually meant to be together,” Will said firmly. “I can’t be around him; his influence on me is far too strong, and I would never endanger you. We’re building something he can’t take away.”

“Of course he can’t. No one can take a love away, it’s an emotion. It’s always going to belong to us.”

“I’m glad about that,” Will breathed out with a timid smile. “Your kindness humbles me, baby.”

“It’s only the least of what you deserve.” Lucas hesitated, moving on to massage Will’s upper back. “You know, Hannibal can’t do anything about his feelings for you either. Is that what you meant by Zero Sum Game?”

“It is.”

Lucas curled his lip as his eyes narrowed. “I want to completely despise him, but I just feel a lot of anger. I hate him for loving you. I can tell from what you’ve said that he really did, and probably still does love you. It’s scary when evil people show that they’re capable of love. I don’t like that you have to live knowing you’re loved that way.”

Will kept irrationally waiting for a rejection from Lucas that never came. “I don’t know that he loves me at all, not after the games, the back-and-forth emotional warfare. All I know is… it’s important for me to be truthful about Hannibal, if only with you. But what’s more vital here is for you to understand, before you get in any deeper with me, I am a dangerous man. I have a beast inside me, and if I fed it enough, it’d run wild.”

“There’s something beautiful about that, but no surprise there. It’s part of *you*.” Lucas didn’t look at Will differently, unless it was to be even more attracted and fond of him. “Of course it’s beautiful.”

Will nodded, holding back tears. He wanted to hear about Lucas' past, not lose it and start bawling halfway through the discussion. "You're not the first to tell me that. I've never been able to see it in myself."

"I can see it for both of us, how's that? You're stunning, inside and out, in every way. Surely you can't expect me to be turned off by hearing that my boyfriend is a genius, tough guy former FBI profiler badass who kicks butt and takes numbers."

"Kick butt and take names," Will chortled. "Thank you, sweetheart." He let out a shaky exhale. "Jesus, that took a lot out of me. 'Tough guy,' though? Lucas, I'm basically the human version of *Winston* eighty percent of the time."

"Sure," Lucas allowed thoughtfully, "But sometimes you're more like if Winston caught someone breaking in. He'd definitely protect us. Not because he's violent but it's in his nature, it's primal."

"Oh, to be a dog." Will crumpled against Lucas one more time for a nice, long hug. He felt unburdened and hugely relieved after sharing his truth.

Now, he wanted very much to know about Lucas' own history. He was already infuriated with whoever these fucking people were from his hometown, the ones who apparently ruined his life for no goddamn reason. If Lucas truly understood the depths of Will's darkness or the sharpness of his inner beast's fangs, he might not have shared the tale.

"I want you to tell me about what happened to you now," Will invited warmly. "Unless it's too hard to talk about. Then we can wait until you're ready."

"Before all of it started, I was fine. Or, I thought I was fine." Lucas took Will's legs over his lap and caressed his lover's calves and ankles.

It seemed to calm him, the simple, sweet touch, the easy access to emotional intimacy and a comforting connection. He got through telling his story because he was telling it to Will.

"I was recently divorced. But putting my life back together, transitioning, career-wise. Optimistic, but cautiously. Had plenty of friends, very tight-knit group, known them since we were little kids growing up together. I trusted them, thought we knew each other. Soon, I had a girlfriend – thought we knew each other, too. Looking back now, I can see the flaws, warning signs, but I'd just blind myself to them. I wanted so badly to be happy, you know?"

Will nodded. "That's all anybody wants. Nothing wrong with that, baby."

"I believe that if I had been more honest with myself about the quality of my relationships, I might have seen what happened next before it happened. But I was completely surprised. Shock of a lifetime. I have a friend, the only one who stood by me throughout the scandal. His name is Bruun. He always said I put up with too much and should assert myself more. He was so right. I let my ex-wife push me around after a miserable marriage where she sucked the life right out of me. I would assert myself only when I absolutely had to, like to help my son, Marcus. But to speak up for my own wants and needs? I let many things go to keep the peace."

“Divorce is hard,” Will put in. “It’s only natural to try and maintain whatever peace you can for the sake of your son. And she certainly wasn’t going to put the effort in.”

“No wonder you dislike her so much,” Lucas smiled. “Then there was my friend group. I constantly did favors for them, never getting any help when I needed it, or usually even a thank you. So of course they all believed a vicious lie about me invented by an incompetent, ignorant woman who had no right to call herself an educator. Even my girlfriend asked me if I did it.”

“That’s awful,” Will said, squeezing Lucas’ hand and kissing his cheek. “I’m so sorry, baby.”

“Thank you, darling, you’re so good to me. Well, a couple of numb years later, I woke up next to her realizing I'd been living by the numbers, so grateful to have my life back, but I wasn’t really living. None of the broken bonds could heal. I remembered the horror of my scandal in perfect detail, but could not remember why in God’s name I’d stayed in this town. I’d shut almost everyone out of my heart, Nadja included. I used to think I was lucky she still wanted to be with me. One day, I just told her it was over in a voice like *she* used, suspecting me of doing that. So she knew why I broke up with her. She never had to ask why I left.”

“Good for you.”

“Marcus went to boarding school,” Lucas continued. “He’s thriving. So I finally got out of there and moved to the States to start over.”

“Smartest thing you could do,” Will said. “Healing couldn’t happen while you were still there, in that same role, inhabiting it like a ghost. You came back to life recently, which includes the trauma. It includes finally starting to heal.”

“I’m getting better everyday, and with you – much better.”

Lucas’ shy smile made Will’s heart feel full. He knew he would do anything to make Lucas happy and safe.

“My job to make sure it keeps going like that,” Will said tenderly.

Sitting up straight, he bent his knees so that their faces were close. “Honey, you’ve been vague about why this scandal happened. What exactly were you accused of doing? How did the townspeople behave towards you in response?”

Lucas told him. Will sat beside him, rigidly still and silent. Since he wasn't sure what else to do, Lucas kept going, recounting everything about Theo, Agnes, Klara. And the former friends who turned into bullies. Getting beat up at the store, feeling completely dejected and alone.

Will’s hands formed fists which then pressed hard into the knees of his jeans. He managed to hold the rage in until Lucas told him what had happened to Fanny.

“*No!*” he finally shouted, standing up with his eyes blazing pure wrath. “Not your dog, are you serious? They threw a fucking brick through your window and sent you out to find her in

a bag? Lucas, I'm going to fucking kill them. I'll rip their organs out with my bare hands and cram them down their throats."

Will rubbed a hand over his face and shook his head, walking aimlessly around the room. "How could they do that to you, and it was right around Christmas, too? It's too much. Fanny. Your son having to see you endure this, *God.* Your friends were never your friends. Or they could *never* have…"

Suddenly, he pressed a hand to his mouth and then bolted to the bathroom, where he threw up for several minutes.

Lucas was there, pressing a warm cloth to his sweaty brow and rubbing his back. Will allowed his lover to take care of him and help as he cleaned up. But afterwards, he stared at his eerie face in the mirror, realizing he looked deranged. He didn't care. While vomiting was at least a release, getting it over with didn't calm him down one bit.

"I can't believe this," he kept saying as he clutched the corners of the sink and Lucas kissed him softly, "They're just living their regular lives like nothing even *happened,* as if they didn't ruin you for their own repulsive gratification. You were always their scapegoat because you're worth a hundred of them and they know it."

"I know they never treated me well, sweetheart. It was a hard and too-long-coming realization. Hey?" Lucas followed Will out of the bathroom as the younger man plunged through the hall and back to the living room. "Those were bad times, but I'm fine now. I have you, I–"

"*Not good enough.* They ruined your entire life! *It kills me!* You don't understand!" Will heard himself and knew he was nearly screaming.

He was aware of Lucas carefully framing him between his strong arms, trying to get through to him and offer comfort.

"You shouldn't comfort me, Lucas, this is about what *you* went through," Will said through a blur of tears that stung his eyes. He'd yelled so loudly that his throat hurt and the dogs half-woke up, jostling around on their cushions briefly, too trusting to become alarmed since they knew their master was never a danger to them.

"What you went through, baby, look at you, how precious and special you are–" Will's eyes spilled over as his voice became hoarse. He held Lucas' face and stroked his cheeks, then kissed them.

"So are you, Will. It's okay. All of that's in the past, many, many miles from here. Please, you have enough trauma of your own to deal with, you can't take the weight of mine away from me."

"I would if I could," Will said insistently, pointing his finger as if confronting those he held responsible for Lucas' downfall. "I'd take it all away from you and erase it. To even think that they could be so cruel to the sweetest man in the world, that some idiot principal gets it in her head that a kid's one-off, clueless comment held water, so she teams up with the

community to rip your world to shreds? And – God, no. *No!* For them to grab onto that despicable accusation, when all you ever did was care for those children and give them the attention their fucking parents never did. What the fuck is wrong with them? What? How *could* they? Not letting you buy food, beating you up, making you *bleed?*"

Lucas realized he was unable to ease Will down from his panicked state of rage, disgust and sadness.

"Are you afraid, baby?" Will asked, looking desperate. "Please don't be afraid of me, I won't lash out at you."

"I'm not afraid of you, darling, I'm worried you'll hurt yourself." Lucas was quietly agitated, remaining steadily calm, anchoring Will before he disappeared into far away, stormy seas. "Can you please give that to me for now?"

Without even realizing it, Will had yanked a letter opener off a table while he paced around. Now, he looked down to see it sinking ever deeper into his palm as blood oozed out around it.

"Shit, I don't even remember having this," he admitted. "I'll just wash up…again. Sorry, sweetie, I'll calm down."

Lucas smiled, taking the letter opener, which resembled a knife, to the kitchen for washing. Will had a double sink, so he used the other side to clean up with soapy water for the second time since hearing Lucas' story.

The older man had a first aid kit in one of his suitcases, so he brought the small blue box to Will and reached for his hand.

"Don't feel like you have to make yourself act calmly on my account. I only want to help you remember to breathe and drink some water. Soon you'll come to bed and I'll hold you all night. Some rest will make you feel much better tomorrow. But you can feel however you need to for as long as you like. I'm not going anywhere, and all I care about is loving you."

The "L" word had slipped into their conversation without either of them being surprised. That seemed normal and right; it was so many other things that were seriously messed up and disturbing.

Will felt woozy, whether from his state of shock, his overwhelming need to spill the blood of Lucas' enemies, or the fact of his lover cleaning his wound in this particular way.

He flashed back to Hannibal cleaning his cut-up hands after his fight to the death with Randall Tier. Like Lucas, Hannibal touched him as if he was unspeakably lovely and a marvel to behold. It was uncanny how similarly they held his injured hand and cleaned the cuts with precise tenderness and care. To Will, they had never seemed to look alike beyond superficialities until now, but in this moment they almost merged with him in his free-fall, falling with him, the three of them as one.

"Are you dizzy?" Lucas asked, finishing the bandage.

“I feel faint. And like an idiot for losing my mind. I’m being…a crazy brat and I can’t even stop myself.” Ashamed, but no less enraged and sorrowful, Will hung his head.

“Hush now, skat, that’s not true. You’re not a crazy brat. You’re the man I love, and you got upset because I was hurt badly when you couldn’t help me. That doesn't sound crazy. I know how powerful your empathy is. Here, I’ll take you to bed now, since you already brushed your teeth. Come now, beautiful.”

Will felt his spirit lift at Lucas’ total acceptance, his capacity for love at least on par with the strength of Will’s unusually acute empathy. He let Lucas change him from jeans and flannel into a fresh white tee and pair of gray briefs. When the older man got into bed and reached out for him, blinking like a sleepy owl once his glasses were off for the night, Will couldn’t help an adoring smile and even a brief, delighted laugh.

“Feels so good having you here with me,” Will said, snuggling into his little spoon position as Lucas made him warm and safe, holding him where he belonged.

Lucas smelled of Will’s own bath soap by now, a light, clean scent of sandalwood and lime. He was shirtless in his boxers, and his body felt even more delicious than it smelled. The taste of Lucas’ kisses filled his memory, and his heartbeat finally began to slow down to normal. His breath gradually went from short, harsh gulps to regular and comfortable.

“That’s it, my darling,” said Lucas near Will’s ear, caressing his chest and stomach slowly. “Just breathe in and out.”

“I will. Thanks for tonight, I…I know that it’s better we have these things out in the open. We know all there is to know about one another, and it means the world to me. But Lucas, I owe you another apology.”

Lucas chuckled, then yawned. “How is that possible? It hasn’t been long enough for you to do anything else apology-worthy. In your mind, anyway.”

“No, you’re wrong about that. Because I am going to kill them, Lucas. Tomorrow I’m booking a flight to Denmark and I’ll spend a couple of days staking them all out. Then, I’ll pay them back for what they did to you. I know how to do this without being caught. And after, I will come right home to you. I promise.”

“Will…I know that *tonight* you feel this way. Why don’t you get some sleep and we’ll talk about it in the morning? There’s no need to…” Lucas trailed off confusedly.

“I know you never had someone vow to kill multiple people to avenge you. It’s okay not to know how to respond. I told you I can be crazy under the right circumstances. Someone hurting you is *intolerable.*”

“You’re my crazy, then, all mine.” Lucas carded his fingers through Will’s curls and just held him.

Finally, Will sank into his drowsiness, unable to resist it when Lucas’ embrace and the feeling of his skin pressed so close was his own personal drug.

That night, he had several vivid, chaotic dreams. Two of them were variations on a brutal bloodbath he'd unleash on Lucas' enemies. He killed them, those people who were only faint blurs, unknown as to appearance in his mind's eye. He did it in the worst ways he'd learned by studying the grisliest cases the FBI's Behavioral Science division had ever taken on. And he smiled with savage, gleeful satisfaction.

The third dream, closer to when he woke in the morning and remaining clearer in his recollection, was of two men making love to him at once, and to each other. He felt Lucas and Hannibal's mouths all over him, felt their wandering hands, stroking, caressing, tongues lapping, lips sucking his most vulnerable erogenous zones, doing it the ways he loved best. He watched, slowly stroking himself, as his two nearly identical lovers kissed each other, and woke with his hand on his hard cock.

It had been a night of dreams brimming and dripping with depraved visions.

Yet the last fantasy was nothing but glorious, rough and splendid passion between himself and the two men he loved. He could still feel their bodies as the three of them had pressed together with raunchy moans, and knew he wouldn't be shaking the dream anytime soon.

The ache in his body felt like Lucas and Hannibal, the empty places in Will that he needed them to fill over and over. And it also felt like the hunger in his soul to fly to Denmark, find those disgusting former "friends" and rip flesh from their necks until blood poured like a river. To hang them up and bleed them like wild animals who had been hunted and caught.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: HANNIBAL. 😈 Plus, what Will did in Denmark, how he responds to seeing a certain cannibal again, and what Lucas does with the whole messy situation... 👀

crisping up on your backburner

Chapter Notes

Welcome back, my dears! I had written Chapters 5-6 a couple of months ago but was going through a chaotic time "irl." Happy to now be updating my various stories as I've been wanting to for all this time!

This chapter takes place...well, entirely in Hannibal's thoughts, which means you're in for *a lot* of drama. Hopefully, you missed him in the previous chapters and won't mind him going off on ten or so self-pitying, Will-Graham-obsessing tangents now that he has arrived. 😄

I will also post the following chapter shortly!

"*I know that you'll never come back*
You know that I had to leave
Sometimes I wanna lean on what used to be
don't do it intentionally
But I find a way to keep you close to me
I keep you close" -Alana Springsteen

***

Hannibal appreciated the print copies of *USA Today*, *Time Magazine* and *Tattlecrime* which he received in his cell at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

People so often referred to print as a dead medium. Yet there was a pleasantness to *holding* his reading material, along with a nostalgia, almost a comfort. He was not offered, nor allowed a tablet for reading the same content. Obviously, he couldn't be trusted anywhere near the internet, but Alana sadly underestimated how much he could accomplish without any outside resources to speak of.

Soon enough she would see. He had instinctively felt Will drawing closer, although he cautioned himself it might be his own wishful thinking and no indication of a pending reunion. But as he thumbed through the paper he was never untouched by the random fantasies of Will that always seemed to scatter across his thoughts. A kiss from Will's plush lips wickedly teased his mental palate, although nothing he had read in the day's news thus far would have naturally brought his beloved to mind.

The other advantage to hard copy reading material was, of course, that he could neatly (and precisely) tear out any photos or quotes of interest and keep them pressed in his commonplace book.

In fact, he would be slightly embarrassed if Will ever saw his collection, since the whole scrapbook contained at least 95 percent pictures of Will…

Photos of him from all of the publications, whether from the trial, or candids of him trying to live that "normal new life" of his that made Hannibal grit his sharp teeth and glare at the wall.

These had unfortunately ceased when Will moved away from Wolf Trap and went into an obscurity which Hannibal knew would be quite intentional and carefully planned on the part of his clever boy. But as much as he regretted the loss of photos to keep his darling closer, Hannibal was glad that Will had found a way to get away from the press and most likely the FBI as well.

From time to time he pictured Will — melancholy and missing him terribly, of course — eking out a peaceful, but ultimately meaningless and hollow existence in some picturesque rural location. Will would be surrounded by his dogs, but bereft of human companionship because who could measure up to Hannibal?

One must not look a gift horse in the mouth, he knew — and to add in another maxim, ignorance was bliss. If Will had attempted dating, or even if he had found a new platonic friend who he spent a great deal of personal time with — if he felt at home in their presence — if he opened up to them in the slightest (closed book that Will was), it would hurt Hannibal — and it would *infuriate* him beyond measure.

A strange state of being was Hannibal's, wherein he constantly hounded the news for any sign of Will, but at the same time realized he might be better off not knowing what his beloved was doing. He did not want to learn of anything shocking whilst locked up — what if he urgently needed to leave and something delayed his escape?

As easy as he imagined it would be to casually disappear from his current "home" if and when he ever opted to, this was not a risk worth taking when his own sanity was at stake. The really anxiety-conducive part of the whole affair remained Hannibal's inability to predict his own reaction. He knew that if Will moved on without him, he would be hurt and angry. How much of each emotion, and how mad it would drive him, however, he could not seem to accurately guess.

And there was Will again, never more present than in his absence, since in his absence his ghost was so much more openly affectionate and attentive to the lovesick cannibal. This line of thinking was just one of many well-worn attempts to block out the misery of Will's absence, and it was disappointingly insufficient. He really wanted Will to be within his reach at all times, not caring if Will was moody or didn't always return his affections. Nothing could substitute the real Will, nor his impact on Hannibal.

For who could make the meticulous Ripper unpredictable, except for the one person who Hannibal could never predict?

The "rub" of not being able to predict Will also came with a grating paranoia which Hannibal might suffer less from if his lovely boy had a more even temper or settled disposition.

As it was, Will might kiss him or kill him, or both at the same time, and Hannibal would not know until the very moment it happened.

The grand scheme of Hannibal's life was threefold - with one prequel that occurred before his personal transformations, before he burst from his own chrysalis. There was losing his parents, but even more so, his little Mischa. Then Hannibal had Happened. The last twist in the road of life had been Will Graham Happening to him.

And he did not desire his independence returned to him at the cost of being condemned to pine for Will. He had, at least, monster that he was in all other respects — at length learned his lesson that he must give into love instead of trying to eradicate it from his system. He had spent too many years injecting poison into his own pleading love. Every act committed to push Will away only shoved Will deeper into his heart; every time he hurt Will, he only hurt himself. Will was the sickness and the cure, together, he mused.

He considered it most likely rather pivotal that he go on believing that he was also Will's sickness and cure. To continue imagining his boy fishing alone, walking through the wintry woods with no one but the dogs and memories of Hannibal for company. Will, waiting for the call from the FBI that might arrive at any moment, the call that would beg him to return to the field to catch some new serial killer. And there it would be: Will's ready-made "excuse" for going to Hannibal, as he had longed to go to Hannibal always. All alone.

Comforting, to think of Will being lonely, as if in this they were -- ironically -- spiritually together. Inseparable. He often reread his scrapbook of small tidbits regarding Will as he had existed during the time leading up to the trial, then for a few months after, until he escaped into his own version of blue oblivion.

Having been lost in Will's eyes so many times, Hannibal could imagine what it might be like to be inside that remarkable mind, to see the world as Will did. But Will did not know how to do the same while loving himself, and Hannibal still wanted to teach him how. Wanted it with all his aching soul. And he could wait because silence had allowed his trust in Will's reciprocal love to strengthen.

So he waited.

The articles on his boy had never been anything revelatory, mostly speculation by Ms. Lounds and rival journalists. Quotes, mainly sound bites Will had blurted, snapped or otherwise stated to the press while trying to get past or through them.

Will mostly stayed to the same simple content: there was no name yet for what Dr. Lecter was and perhaps there simply would never be a word; no, Will did not ever see the Ripper these days, and did not intend to. No, they had never been "in league" or "murder husbands."

Hannibal noticed that one black-and-white newspaper clipping with a photo of a melancholy Will had become half unsealed from its designated page.

He slicked the small, all-important square, with its faint sustenance, in child-safe, non-toxic glue and pressed it firmly into his commonplace book, which happened to be a weathered, hardcover copy of *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje.

Hannibal preferred a slightly worn-out book for such projects, as the pages would be easier to flip through, design and decorate. The book was bloated, pages puffed out from all of the photos and quotes he had collected, so that the novel was almost twice its actual length by now.

If human dignity could be preserved and admirably maintained from behind a glass wall, in a room containing nothing more than a cot, a table and chair, his books in a case bolted to the wall and the facilities, then Hannibal strived towards the goal.

He did not, after all, wish to look pathetic or to show his true feelings of anguish, that he felt run-down, deprived of Will's presence and influence, the subtle Louisianan glide of his accent draped over clever words, the possibility of touch between them.

Hannibal had the uncomfortable sensation that he wasn't even corporeal if Will wasn't with him, since his beautiful boy was the only person who could See him in any real way.

All of these factors contributed to making the holding-up of his chin, his lofty expression, smug smiles and petty remarks a considerable undertaking (secretly). Simply pretending to be above suffering, *while* suffering, took a great deal of his energy and effort. But no one except Hannibal knew this, unless it was Will, who *must* know. Mustn't he?

This long, drowsy lull in news of Will might explain why Hannibal felt so unprepared when he recognized a few key traits in what had initially seemed to be a random article about the recent massacre in a small Danish town.

When he began reading the article, sitting primly at his table, it seemed passably interesting, if only because one so rarely heard of multiple killings being accomplished in a single day with the suspect not only still at large, but totally unknown to the authorities.

He nearly choked on a sip of his sweetened green tea when a realization struck him like a bolt of lightning had blasted the roof above him wide open, sending torrents of pouring rain in to flood and drown him in his cell.

Although he could not fathom how or why, Will Graham was the one behind those murders in Denmark.

In the month or so before the terrible, rainy night in the kitchen, Hannibal and Will had grown closer than ever before. Back when Hannibal's blade had left no accusing and claiming mark on the profiler he loved as yet, although he had found his way to hoping that someday Will would ask him for a scar, for Hannibal to safely cut and forever mark him as his.

During several quietly intimate conversations by firelight in Hannibal's home or occasionally in his office, sitting closely side- by-side on the desk's edge, they had discussed fantasies, ideas and theories involving murder. Will was easily encouraged into sharing some of his notions, as Hannibal reminded him that he must shed his long-held shame in order to Become.

It made sense that as they became such close companions, Will unfurled some of his dark secrets. It must have been a liberation, since Will never had anyone to talk to about these forbidden desires before Hannibal.

"Before you…and after you…"

There had been that night when Hannibal had summoned the nerve to say, "You've done so beautifully since our long pig dinner, Will. Look how you handled Randall. You are ready to go further, and I only hope to be privileged with a chance to be at your side."

Hannibal recalled the way Will had blushed and stared at him, showing off his recently-acquired tolerance for holding eye contact, or at least that of his former enemy. The Ripper had found Will holding his gaze hungrily and having to make himself look away, and it was immensely pleasing.

Even if he had not already known Will's specific, personal murderous design from past discussions, Hannibal would likely have seen his beloved's hand in these Danish killings because Chiyoh had described to him, at length and no small disapproval, how Will displayed the prisoner at Castle Lecter.

Like Hannibal, Will enjoyed, thrived on, and gloried in creating art from what he perceived as vanquished evil.

So far as Hannibal was concerned, rudeness was an evil in its own right. This therefore seemed a fair comparison.

However, Will's design focused more on the consistent theme of metamorphosis. Hannibal theorized this was because Will had trapped himself like an insect in amber, always in a state of transformation without ever transforming. So he enacted the beauty of Becoming in the corpses of his victims, few though they were, and indirectly claimed in one way or another – it was consistent with Will's philosophy, his moral struggle and lack of resolution thereto.

Randall was "rewarded" by Will, made into the animal he longed to be. And as for the vile, emaciated demon from that cell in Lecter Castle, Will had transformed him into the image of a firefly: a glowing insect with its wings spread freely, beautiful in and because of that freedom. It was a fantasy of completing his own journey in a straight line towards his bloodthirst, instead of the jagged and painful way he kept dodging the inevitable truth of himself.

Will had painted his dream evolution once again, on the victims of this formerly bland Danish town.

Over and over, Hannibal read the descriptions and stared down at the few images of the uninteresting country town and its banal locals who were left behind to grieve friends and family killed in what they deemed a senseless murder spree.

Hannibal sneered, a micro-expression but a telling one. His brow furrowed. One vein in his temple pulsed insistently with sharp pain. His blood boiled to a curdle. Yet, even as he

pictured his heart turning to stone and then crumbling to dust, he struggled to believe what he now knew…*must* be true.

His mind reeled violently, trying to reject the information but failing in the sight of its offensive obviousness. Perhaps only Hannibal would know it was Will, out of anyone else in the world who read this article over breakfast or while riding a train to work. But he. *Knew.*

Distantly, the therapist and connoisseur of human nature in Hannibal was intrigued by finally learning how he would react to upsetting news about Will. But the wild flailing of his mind combatting truth were soon so immensely troublesome as to outweigh any interest in the matter from a psychiatric perspective.

When it came to Will, intimacy was unavoidable; detachment impossible. And he could not believe his own eyes for three more readings of the article because he intensely tried to spit the facts out instead of swallowing.

Does Will really think he can just do *this and I will accept it, sit here in this cell wasting away, and let him roam free to destroy our future happiness together? He can't seriously believe I'll accept this news with docile and idiotic resignation!*

No. No, surely I am mistaken, I see Will everywhere, I may be making a baseless conjecture.

Will wouldn't do that to us. He wouldn't come into his own as a killer at long last and exclude me from it, as if I never even mattered. He…couldn't.

But, quite clearly, Will already had.

"Did you believe you could change me, as I changed you?"

"I already did."

In order to resist a primordial urge to crumple the newspaper into a tiny ball, then rub it stubbornly against the table until it caught fire, he bit his tongue until blood filled his mouth.

He released the jaw-locked incision of his fang-like teeth from the tender organ, only to prevent an inevitable visit from the medic, and the rousing of dear Alana's suspicion.

It was vital as lifeblood that he kept Alana's new blindfold intact until the hour of his departure. Ideally, just past it.

He must waste no time, therefore, in accomplishing his exit. Apparently, he had already, unknowingly (innocently, faithfully!) waited too long, while erroneously believing inaction the only active recourse, the last remaining safe place to stow his endless passion in a state of painful constriction, of hopeful stasis (An unnatural state brought forth by an unwillingly natural emotion: that of damning, incorrigible and unchangeable love for Will Graham).

Rather than becoming consumed by knowledge of his own foolish, quickly evaporating trust in Will's regard for him, he focused what he could even gather (with great effort) of his normally indefatigable energies towards concocting a proactive, yet subtle plan for bidding the hospital a speedy adieu.

Hannibal could not, if asked, and if inclined to confide, have said why exactly his entire being cried out to leave this place where he had been waiting for Will so stubbornly for all of this time, and suddenly give up this plan – risk it all, all over again just on the chance he might be able to reach Will.

A risky gambit such as leaving a high-security facility while knowing he would instantly be catapulted to the top of *America's Most Wanted*, carried enormous potential peril. He would have to evade the authorities balletically for several days, perhaps, before he could completely fade into a fog, his location finally beyond even the Ripper "experts'" guessing.

If they did not have Will's location (and they must not), then they would not know Hannibal's travel destination. With calculated effort, he could shake them off. But not for one moment would he be free from the slight worry that they would find him and put him back here in this awful, suffocating cell. Not until he had cut their tether off him and moved on knowing for certain he had successfully lost them.

Putting himself in this place and being put there by force were two very different things.

If he escaped and was caught, it would then be extremely difficult to achieve a second departure. Loathe as he was to admit it, given his skills and genius, it might not even be possible. Yes, the risk was large - mostly because this could not be a long-planned and perfectly strategized exit. He had no time to lose. He had already lost too much. It would have to be a merely sufficient plan. Most importantly, an efficient one.

He had to see Will, and the urge nearly screamed over any other rational question or caution in his overcrowded, noisy mind.

Perhaps, he thought, drumming his fingers on the table with an eerily blank expression, it was so stressful because of his worry that Will might have decided he did not need Hannibal for anything at all.

That Will believed he had truly "gotten over" Them and could galavant around on international jaunts of bloodbaths, unscathed by guilt, obligation or heartbreak, perhaps bereft of even a thought of Hannibal, without whom he never would have opened up to his true self anyway.

It was worse than insulting and a mortification to Hannibal's proud ego, having considered himself Will's mentor in addition to "future lover" and soulmate (the last two items having been persistently difficult to put into words while conversing with Will) (possibly he regretted this quite vehemently at present).

He stood, dragging the chair back robotically, but with a squealing noise against the floor that normally would have set his nerves on edge. As it was, he barely even heard it. His nerves were so fraught they seemed beyond repair. And each time he convinced himself he was overreacting, another surge of nauseating realization hit him and he felt even worse, not having known it was possible.

Finally, a half hour after beginning to slowly pace his small living area, he accepted — begrudgingly — that he was not overreacting. Unfortunately, going mad was the only sane

reaction to what he had read and what he now knew.

As he finished pacing with his hands neatly clasped behind his back, the question echoed through his mind palace, taunting him in Will's own familiar, much-missed voice.

"Is it possible that I think I have freed myself from the chains binding us as one, chains which you were so sure were irrevocably locked? Do I really think I can separate us without mortally wounding us both? Is that what I have found, out here on my own, Hannibal? Have I accomplished a confident new certainty that I don't need you anymore? And it was you who left me to my own devices: that breakup speech in my dim bedroom could have been a test or a cry for help, for all you knew. Maybe you gave me up too easily."

"I never gave you up, Will. I'm incapable of doing any such thing."

"So you claim. I have no reason to believe you. Maybe I'm just relieved and made a new man of myself after escaping your toxic influence. Maybe I hate you without loving you. And worst of all, maybe I have come to see this love which you believe is eternal, as ephemeral. Past tense. Forgettable, after a certain amount of concentrated effort.

It may just be you all alone in love. Oh, Dr. Lecter. How uncharacteristically pathetic. My reckoning has come full circle after all…"

Hannibal closed his eyes, let out a long breath to steel himself against these masochistic jabs from within. Try as he might, he couldn't *see* Will in his palace right now, which meant that beguiling and mocking voice might only be his own inner voice too-indulgently expressing fears.

He folded the offending newspaper in half, pressed it flat and slid it into his hardcover copy of *Great Expectations*, which had been donated to the hospital recently, prompting him to reread the classic.

Belatedly, he swallowed the bitter swill of blood on his tongue.

There was more to know, though Hannibal did not require much more information. He simply must find and firmly tug loose the original thread from which the entire tapestry had been sewn into being, the springboard if Will's final moral liberation, his Becoming — which felt, bone-deep and deeper – like a shockingly adulterous step – one with final unchangeability. It was done, it was incontrovertibly over.

Now, Hannibal could never witness Will's first slaughter, the long-awaited, luscious wrath of the lamb.

Will's unleashing of forbidden bloodlust was akin to a loss of virginity in the most sacred, intimate church of profane delight – *a savage pleasure we could share. Has someone stolen the privilege from me?*

Never had Hannibal minced words with Will upon the topic of this seduction into the hunt. Will knew that Hannibal had always planned for them to be partners in the feast of gore, the

art of dismantling life and reveling in its slow ebbing out into nothing. The power they both knew, the immediate high that followed a kill…it was meant to be Will's and Hannibal's.

Is there someone else?

But Hannibal had been inhumanly *patient!* Over the endless-feeling days and nights he felt as if he had been rotting in his tiny white box but kept telling himself that notion was a silly pessimism and a waste of time.

With a calmly amused, enigmatic smile and enormous inner anguish he had borne the humiliation of imprisonment, the discomfort and deprivation, and allowed Alana Bloom to rule over him with such a smug sense of superiority (he would deal with her later, and Bedelia du Maurier for that matter… he always kept his promises but some were more important than others. Will would always be most important - he would break every other promise for Will. This scared him; many times he had tried and failed to unthink it).

Hannibal had been *calm and patient* when Frederick Chilton visited to gloat over the Ripper's perceived defeat and share bon mots from his typically air-headed, obnoxious and insultingly untrue "expose" of Hannibal the Cannibal!

And he had been so patient, despite distressingly human love for Will. He had come here only to show his sincerity. Only to wait for his Will. He could be anywhere else in the world right now, but he was *Here: for. Will.*

If the courtship must go on another decade, he would consider it perfectly worthwhile. If he must wait longer and longer still, if he had to walk barefoot over burning coals to reach and hold Will in his arms at the ends of the earth, (and there were days in captivity when the beast in shackles felt those coals searing into his skin) the killing beast had long since become easier to cage than the loving man, into whom Will contorted him, too easily translated, read and condemned him to be. And all of this plus more he would have endured just to be with his darling boy.

Not hunting was nothing – merely forgoing an elite, invigorating, but ultimately superfluous enjoyment, almost like taking a break from piano and cooking, two other sacrifices he had made for Will along with nearly all of his other creature comforts. That he could still sketch was a blessing, as it kept Will's angelic face and stunning figure clear in his mind, perhaps more tangibly than he could fathom it in his palace. To his mild apprehension, it had been difficult to find Will in the walls of his inner world ever since the profiler had "rejected" him.

This afternoon's disorienting inability to face Will in their shared palace chambers and know Will's mind and heart the way he knew his own had not been the first time.

The worst sacrifice was to give up his own power over when he saw Will, but in that area, Will had seemingly left him no other viable choice. The boy's sincere and aching protestations of not wanting to see him or know what he was doing had broken Hannibal inside, to the extent he believed he might not have fully reassembled since.

And now, nothing had changed, except that with each day of missing Will, he wanted Will more, craved his nearness, the sound of his voice, to prove that his own love was real, to

never leave Will's side again. To be trusted, relied upon and loved in return by the only person whose affection he needed.

So, all too eagerly, on the wings of panic such as he'd not felt in too many decades to bear it lightly, Hannibal had submitted himself to this prison sentence, clipped his own wings and held Will's gaze steadily up to the moment he had to tear it away and be torn away. Kneeling in the snow with sirens shimmering red and blue light over him, hands held up to be cuffed. Signing away his own freedom.

He had been chained to the hope of Will's love and forgiveness, *acceptance*, ever since.

The knowledge that Will had Become without him made his choice of confinement appear foolhardy, like a naive and idealistic environmental activist chaining themselves to a building slated for demolition. He paced some more then, sat on his cot, a hand on each knee, visualizing how it might have happened and how Will must have looked. Lust which might have shifted to masturbatory pleasure and taken the edge off his ongoing imprisonment was stopped short with a tremor of angry shame.

NOW, as never before, not even when he slit their daughter's throat in selfish, horrified bitterness, he felt the burn of betrayal and knew he was worse than a fool chained to a love which might be unrequited after all.

He was – he had *been* –

PLAYED by Will Graham. No other act of reciprocity had the equivalent power to destroy Hannibal, and he would, above and beyond all other considerations of safety and sanity – he would KNOW *to whom he was indebted* for this soul-breaking betrayal.

Only Will himself?

Or some *other*, an interloper, some stranger who had stepped into the *artificial* void of his physical absence from Will's life – did he have a rival? Will had done this to him. But who had he done it *for?*

If Hannibal did have a rival, he would know it, would have a name to put to the gnawing agony of the knife in his back. And if he now assumed he had been supplanted by an outsider, he would have more to focus on than the details of his pending departure from present accommodations.

He had a revenge to plan in any such case, a design of suffering, of torment such as no other victim had inspired him to enact. This "rival," if they did exist, would pay for what they had stolen from him.

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In the quietly tense and tentatively happy twilight of their love, before night descended in the form of blood and rain insufficient to wash away the damage with which Hannibal had decimated the man he loved to the utmost extent imaginable (by the one person who really knew how to make him suffer, and turnabout was fair play), he and Will had become

inseparable. Friends, enemies, it had ceased to matter what they were to each other so long as they were together, not until he was sure Will had led him on and used his love as a weapon.

Leaving Will alive in the kitchen, he'd told himself, was a crueler punishment than death. Forcing him to live knowing Abigail's death was because of him, because of his betrayal of Hannibal – surely that was worse than a quick and merciful death.

Hannibal had sidestepped the back-of-his-mind whisper that he couldn't kill Will Graham because he – in fact – *loved* Will more than his own life and could not live in a world without him. Until the day he once again tried to take Will's life, with that infernal and much-regretted bone-saw...this time with comparatively superior deliberation, but there again – perhaps he had fooled Jack Crawford and even Will into thinking he was going through with it…but he had really been pridefully trying to make himself do it.

All the while, he had been praying to the same God he actually loathed that Mason's men would come soon and interrupt him. He had proceeded with such absurd slowness to the task of eating Will's brain that he knew, afterwards, he never would have gone through with it. Another few seconds of the horror he felt in coming that close to snuffing Will's light, and, defeated by the incomparable inside-and-out beauty of his boy, Hannibal would have most likely turned the saw on Jack, then offered Will yet another chance to run away together. He could not help but wonder how that would have gone, how it had gone in some other world, another universe where, just maybe, they both got to be happy.

Rewinding the tape of his memory carefully to the correct point, before the many misadventures which followed to distract him, Hannibal paused at the right moment this time.

Lying on his cot with his eyes closed, hands flat to the thin bed by either side of his white-clad body, he visualized the times when he and Will had discussed murder as an art, a debauched and sacred ritual. It had been a delightful privilege, once he had eased the younger man past the initial hurdle of distrust and guilt at the topic, to hear of Will's personal design.

These conversations, utterly secret and held by Hannibal afterwards with selfish and possessive, equally secret vigor, were the reason why he knew the murders in Denmark had been Will. Of course, he would not speak a word of his knowledge on the subject to the authorities. What would be the point in that? He'd only ever involved the dull machinery of the world in their relationship when he had seen it as the only possible means to an important end.

No, he would contribute to the unlikelihood of anyone placing Will in Denmark by making it appear as if he had escaped with no intention of finding Will and absconded to Cuba. He knew how to lay the path of evidence to give this impression, knew that due to the non-extradition laws, the FBI could not directly pursue him there. They'd be tangled in red tape and would eventually track down the house which he did own in Havana, only to find that he had "apparently just left and flown to some other place."

Meanwhile, he would let the Bureau chase their own tails in this convenient manner as he dealt with his private life directly. Their interference would put him in an extremely bad temper, making this choice of deferring them elsewhere almost kind of him. However, it was

not kind. He was already in a quite-bad temper, if not “extremely” bad yet – he teetered precipitously over the edge of it. And he was in absolutely no mood whatsoever to deal with unnecessary interruptions from those who had no business coming between him and his darling Will at such a vital crisis in their relationship.

His next task, therefore, was to discover Will’s location. This required Chiyoh’s assistance, which he knew he could depend upon, and he managed to bribe one of the guards to deliver the requested information to his adopted sister. The corrupted guard had been paid enough by Chiyoh that Hannibal was sure he would never confess his involvement.

In due course, with typically clear-cut precision and subtlety, Chiyoh sent the information back to Hannibal through the same BSHCI employee.

Knowing Will as he did, Hannibal guessed that Jack and the FBI did not possess the boy’s accurate current address, and they were certainly not going to learn it from him. He memorized the address spoken to him in hushed tones by the guard, and then he had a few days spread before him to wait before the correct interval of time to escape arrived.

There was a small, weekly lapse in security, a sufficient loophole through which he would disappear like the proverbial camel through a needle. On Wednesdays, new patients arrived, plus transfers in and out, and then departures which were actually sanctioned.

Alana had tight enough security and fervent enough paranoia to ensure it would be much harder, although far from impossible, for Hannibal to leave at another time.

However, even she couldn’t help needing to allocate staff to the ins and outs of other patients at least one day a week. And he preferred the easy way in this case, as he had enough of a challenge waiting for him in Maine, with Will.

Part of Hannibal resented the necessity of going to Will as a jealous lover, and whether he considered his feelings about Will’s Becoming in his absence, or the likelihood that Will had taken a lover and this had caused the aforementioned lack of good judgment or sensitivity, Hannibal was certainly that jealous ex-almost-something, a possessive and greedy man out to take back and keep what rightfully belonged to him.

Even knowing he must do so or he would not be able to go on, Hannibal recoiled inwardly at the disgusting display of being “the ex” showing up to mar Will’s possible “happy new beginning.” It would be more challenging than usual to hide his vulnerability with Will, to appear unfazed, even breezy, about his arrival and subsequent confrontation with the boy. But he would manage because he must.

Could Will have truly cuckolded him twice, so abominably?

How could he not predict that Hannibal would know, as he always knew everything about Will, no matter what he must do to find the hidden corners of his favorite mind, to taste every morsel of the heart that haunted him.

Surely his presence in a cell was only further proof of his devoted obsession, a hunger strike wherein he would only take food from Will’s outstretched fingers. Will could not doubt

Hannibal's love, so would he reject it this way, if it was a rejection, if it was done with pride, scorn, sadism?

What was his beautiful boy capable of? He remembered Will's plan for "a reckoning," recalled his sweetheart extolling him with accounts of his fantasies, of having him torn limb from limb, of murdering him sensuously with his hands, remembered Will sending Matthew Brown and returning his invitation of running away the first time, the dinner of lamb, with a proverbial Judas kiss.

Had he underestimated Will where it counted most? Was his boy – was this…? His thoughts began to mutate, distorting themselves and mixing into a blur that threatened to tear his mind to shreds.

He focused on breathing, dedicated himself to reading in order to remain centered however he could. *Great Expectations*, he tore through in another day, and immediately turned back to the beginning, poring over some scenes which had stuck in the maw of his thinking, for better or worse.

Hannibal tossed and turned on the night before his exit from the facility, knowing he must sleep, but finding his thoughts torn asunder from logic and calm. He could not quite seem to stop picturing Will with someone else, gender unimportant, personality less than an afterthought. Even his confused, sleeping mind knew that it would be their destiny to die a horrific death at Hannibal's own hands. It was less than they deserved and he only wished he was capable of bestowing a crueler last fate.

Finally drifting into a deeper sleep, he entered his memory palace and saw the bright black blood on Will's face as the two of them slaughtered faceless masses together in the dead of night. His palace housed quite a few fantasies as well as remnants of the past, and this was among Hannibal's favorite, most-visited visions.

His Will was so beautiful, eyes dark, pupils large, teeth bared, blood caking his perfect jawline, dripping down his long neck, soaking his supple skin. So touchable, yet Hannibal couldn't seem to feel Will when he tried.

The dream of togetherness in a moonlight hunt shifted and changed shape entirely.

Hannibal saw the two of them sitting on the leather armchairs of his office, but they were relocated, as they had been on one previous occasion, to the misty woods outside of Castle Lecter in rural Lithuania.

The green hue of the light shining intermittently through the gnarled-finger shapes of tall treetops canopied above them was undeniably familiar from the merry days of his early childhood, although in those times when the world seemed so fertile with splendid possibilities, there had been much more noise in those woods. Not only Mischa's playful cries in their games of hide-and-go-seek, but the chirping of birds, the scurrying of animals on the ground, foraging and nibbling at nuts and leaves.

All was silent, uncannily still, except for the volume of Will's blaring blue-green eyes, reflecting the shift of light and color as the sun slipped in and out of treetops, a ribbon woven

through the scene to seal them in. And that would have been a more-than-acceptable fate to Hannibal, even with it being, and having been, for many years, impossible to find Mischa in the whole labyrinthian landscape of his far-reaching palace, and even with the corpses of dead birds, squirrels and chipmunks littering the ground around their chairs and for miles beyond.

Will's presence and his soft, questioning smile were worth more than words could say, and it struck Hannibal, even in his dream, as strange that he had spent so many years fighting the temptation to give in and let Will have the reins of his existence, let Will slice him open and see what he was made of, see that it was not pure evil and malice, not only elegance and art, but pulsing, begging pain, longing to be loved by the one person who could, the one person who had made him this way, a mess of weakness, lashing against love like those animals must have fought their own demise in the forest, even as they perished from a larger predator's hunt or plain starvation. He supposed these melancholy events transpired here in his palace, even when he did not witness them. His unconscious mind was always at work, in ways which Hannibal quite often knew nothing of until later.

"It's the latter that perturbs me at the moment," he admitted to Will with an attempt to smile that would not fool his beloved. "You are starving me to death. I wonder if you know what that is like and what it represents, on a visceral plain of my deepest self. Yet, as I always seem to, I let you do with me as you please. I have surely been mad since the first moment I laid eyes on you, Will."

Hannibal always tried so hard never to let any form of exhaustion become manifest via his person suit. But how could he hide it from Will now? The chips were well and truly down, and they had been torn asunder too many times by his hesitating obfuscation. This was, in short, no time for nonsense.

Will rested a finger on his lower lip, brow knitted as he thought about Hannibal's confession. He was dressed in all-black, Gothic and gorgeous, legs crossed like Hannibal's, but his posture more roguishly relaxed, a challenge of its own. Will knew that he had the upper hand, and it made him comfortable while constantly glorying in making the fact manifest, reminding Hannibal of his comparative weakness with just a small twist of his pretty smile or a sleek arch of one dark eyebrow.

"I have often thought of you." Will's smile grew with a tender wildness that clawed at Hannibal's heart.

"Have you?" Hannibal did not conceal the rush of hope this occasioned. Being forgotten by Will was his worst fear, as far worse than being hated was becoming nothing at all.

Will nodded. "Of late, very often. There was a long hard time when I kept far from me the remembrance of what I had thrown away when I was quite ignorant of its worth. But since my duty has not been incompatible with the admission of that remembrance, I have given it a place in my heart."

Hannibal sat up even straighter, leaning forward with a fascinated glint in his amber sea-glass eyes. He recognized that he and Will were reciting from the last page of *Great Expectations*, and contented himself with carrying out the scene, curious and comforted by it.

“You have always held your place in my heart,” Hannibal replied, taking up Pip’s side of the conversation as if it had been waiting for him all along in the world of dreams and unspoken aspirations.

A brief silence, and then Will resumed, even more warmly, leaning forward just as Hannibal had, their positions expressing the desire to be so much closer.

“I little thought,” said Will, using Estella’s words, “that I should take leave of you in taking leave of this spot. I am very glad to do so.”

“Glad to part again, Will?” Hannibal gave him a bitter smile, sitting back and drumming his fingers on his knees with restless bafflement. “To me, parting is a painful thing. To me, the remembrance of our last parting has been ever mournful and painful.”

“But you said to me,” returned Will, very earnestly, “‘The teacup that was broken might still come together’. I have been bent and broken, but—I hope—into a better shape. Be as considerate and good to me as you were, and tell me we are friends.”

“We are friends,” said Hannibal, rising from his chair and bending over Will, gazing down at him.

“And will continue friends apart,” said Will.

Hannibal shook his head. “I think you know me better than that, mylimasis.”

He took Will’s hand in his and gently tugged it, smiling invitingly. Will allowed Hannibal to help him stand and then they went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when Hannibal first left the forge, running for his life, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to him, he saw no shadow of another parting from–

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He woke in a cold sweat and cursed profusely under his breath, surprised to find the words emerging in his native tongue, which he seldom used. Typical that Will should bring it out of him, drag him back to the past while Hannibal fought to avoid it, only getting dirt beneath his nails for his trouble.

He sat up, clammy and caked in sweat, his annoying prison jumpsuit clinging to him and itching his skin all over. Raking a hand through his hair, he regarded his own reflection in the glass window before him. He looked the same, essentially, but had prison somehow dulled his intelligence and senses?

How in the nine levels of Hell had Will Become without Hannibal feeling it as it happened? Had Will truly taken scissors so definitely to the red cord binding their hearts, or had Hannibal lost the thread all by himself?

Surely, he should have felt something when Will was cutting those people up, then arranging them with symbolic accusation and hate, but not as extravagantly as Will normally would. He

was endeavoring to make the murders anonymous, and that meant avoiding any signatures of his style.

Hannibal knew by the incisions which he had, conversationally, taught Will how to make, and because he could translate the muted display of carnage that no one else would understand.

Even his pride in Will was tarnished by his broken-hearted disappointment and perceived rejection. How had this physical separation rendered him and Will so terribly, spiritually separate? It had never been so before, not during Will's own incarceration, not when Hannibal abandoned his boy like the fool he had been back then, flying to Europe in a cowardly fumble for control he would never get back.

Will had already plucked that control and autonomy from Hannibal like a pearl snatched from a shell, and now it was little wonder Hannibal felt so empty, it was as if the inside of him had been scraped excruciatingly bare with a ruthless blade. Will Graham pared him like a fruit and crushed the tender pulp of Hannibal's emotions, then simply walked away.

How could it be that easy for Will? What was so different this time? Or perhaps he needed to keep asking Who was different this time. Who had invaded his Will's life and tried to take Hannibal's rightful place as the boy's adoring partner in all things?

Had his own blind optimism anesthetized him to reality? Had he become complacent and lost his edge — was he now merely an echo or faded watercolor of the man who Will once cared for? Once upon a time, it seemed not that long ago and far away, Will had cared enough to forgive Hannibal for destroying him in the most personal and sadistic manner, twice, and had built a boat to cross the Atlantic and see the same man who had broken him and left in a huff of false pretension. Where was the Will who he was quite sure used to love him?

He wanted his boy.

As his pride shrank down to a mere pinprick of light and logic in the huge wasteland of panic he felt, he knew he was past such illusions of having moved on or even wanting to. He must go to Will as the product of Will's artistry- as a hollowed out and desperate man, not as a haughty beast.

The knowledge wasn't as bad as the pain of losing Will.

Nothing hurt that much. He would not bear it, he even refused to accept that they were not destined for one another, eternally.

Whoever else was in his way would be duly disposed of. He was angry with Will, but he already knew damned well it would only take a single look at that beautiful face before his guard vanished like the pathetic facade made of ghosts which it now was. And he would forgive his boy, not even regretting his own weakness. Not if it meant that Will could still See and desire him, as before.

Hannibal had waited for Will to come to his senses and return to him, and he had waited and waited and waited until even his memory palace failed to suffice in reminding him what it

was like to do anything but wait in languishing distress and suspense for Will Graham.

But it was all clear now.

Hannibal had waited long enough. It was time for action now - past time. But never too late.

Because it just *couldn't* be.

while you're at it

Chapter Summary

Time to check back in with Will and Lucas 🥰🥺

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"And I said while you're at it, pull off and turn the radio down low cause all night we have it
You can take your time pulling me in close.
I hear everything that you're saying,
your hands are speaking my language.
So tell me about it, while you're at it"
-Alana Springsteen

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"Lucas?" Will called with bated breath, arriving home from the airport and setting his suitcase down beside the front door.

He closed the door behind him and scanned the house restlessly, still half-afraid Lucas might have woken up to common sense and left him. It was so quiet in the house…*too* quiet?

What if Lucas had changed his mind about being miraculously able to tolerate Will's mental instability and craving for violence, not to mention how selfishly Will could pursue vengeance when he got into a sickeningly righteous mood and couldn't hold himself back?

And on top of that, Will was frighteningly talented at killing. He was *too* good at it. He scared himself, and yet it elated him. That's how it was in Denmark: Will's righteous wrath and his choice of punishments on those who evoked it. As he had done it, he felt closer to Hannibal than he had in ages, but his heart still belonged to Lucas in equal measure. In the glorious blur of blood, it had seemed okay to love them both. It made sense. And to his confusion, even now, it still did.

After all, Lucas was why he had been there across the ocean, invading that harmless-seeming town of lying trash disguised as decent people. They had ruined Lucas's life and now their lives were all either over, ruined, or in the most merciful circumstances, tarnished irrevocably.

Will never wanted them to take another *breath* without remembering what they had done to Lucas and he was quite sure now, they never would.

The conceited and disgusting way they had all moved on like Lucas had never been part of their world and as if they had not broken him out of despicable distrust and cruelty! Will almost got mad again thinking about it, and put it out of his mind accordingly. He had exacted his vengeful design and he had not done all of that just to come back to his lover still as bent out of shape as before he left.

And after all it was Hannibal he fantasized about and craved while he dug his blade deep into the thick resistance of living flesh, Hannibal when he placed the victims in their rightful places, not quite a tableau, but poetic justice, carving out his simplified design. Will had let in the desire to impress Hannibal and for him to praise Will for his Becoming. Although he had thought of his wonderful, beloved Lucas the whole time he had been overseas, he had also never been without thoughts and dreams of Hannibal.

The scorching-hot sex dreams about Hannibal joining him and Lucas in raunchy, sweat-soaked and rapturous acts had become an almost nightly occurrence.

Will didn't want to come back to Lucas still looking like he had before leaving: half-insane, a loaded gun. He took responsibility for his own actions by insisting that he must be better now. Must be the man Lucas needed, if that is, he was lucky enough that Lucas would still have him, bloody hands, depraved mind and all.

"Darlin'?" Will added, making his way down the hall towards the bedroom, hoping his boyfriend was napping and that accounted for the quiet.

Please please please…

Seconds later, before he reached the bedroom, the dogs came running to him excitedly from the kitchen - which meant that just they'd come back from a walk, instead of being asleep somewhere in the house as Will had suspected (afraid to think Lucas might be out walking them, in case he might be wrong).

But his dogs were rushing to him from that direction, and it meant that Lucas was there, unless Will was about to encounter someone else retained by Lucas to care for the dogs?!

Before his heart could attack itself with predictable distress over such a sad theory, he heard the distinct and unmistakable sound of Lucas calling to him.

"Will? Are you back?"

He sounded so damn excited that Will's heart leapt for joy.

Naturally, the dogs reached Will and went nuts with various shows of affection, none of them overly aggressive, but it was quite the experience to have seven dogs all trying to nose into him, solicit his affection and make inquisitive little noises.

The smaller dogs who thought they were huge jumped on Will's legs and he let them get away with it for once because their little faces were just so damn sweet, and he had missed them.

“Yeah, honey - It’s me alright, now get your cute ass in here pronto!” He called back to Lucas.

Will crouched down and petted each dog, greeting them all by name and giving them some treats he had purchased at the airport upon his return.

And by then, of course, Lucas was there, striding towards Will and the dogs with a sunny smile, blushing. He had on his glasses, a light blue shirt and an ivy-green sweater with Dad Jeans, and he looked like a hot professor Will wanted to fuck. A lot. Often. Constantly. There was one class he never would have passed, just look at this man… he was so handsome it hurt. So loving and cozy and sexy.

“Hello, skat,” Lucas grinned, showing off his slightly crooked teeth and reminding Will how goddamn cute they were, plus how hot they felt when Lucas bit him. As memories of all the above cascaded over his immensely relieved mind and heart, he shivered in pure happiness.

Luckily, Winston instinctively gathered that the two men wanted to be able to get near one another, and he used his impressive sheepdog-esque skills to tell his siblings to back off. Winston led them all to their water dishes which Lucas had refilled for them, and the nonchalantly pleased look on Winston made Will and Lucas both laugh softly and say “awww!”

“Winston is a very good boy,” Will announced, and Winston seemed to enjoy this compliment, although he didn’t disagree.

“I’ve craved my sweet boy,” Lucas said tentatively, getting used to Will being up close and personal again.

And Lucas was very much real and there, waiting only for Will and now gazing at him as if Will had just returned from hanging the moon, rather than —

Will’s heart melted as tears sprang into his eyes.

“Oh, baby,” he sighed, as the last of the dogs trotted by them and they were alone.

Shaking his head in blissful disbelief at his good fortune in life, Will crashed into his lover without further ado, like a hurricane wave slapping the soft shore, unable to hold back and just praying not to do damage.

Ohhh God. Finally. It felt like Will had been gone a year. Lucas’s sweater was so damn *soft,* and his arms were strong and *warm* around Will. He felt both protective and protected, as Lucas’s broader form seemed to eclipse his more slender one. And then he felt - almost whole. Definitely happier than he had any right to be.

“You smell *so good*,” Will declared with his face so buried in Lucas’s chest that his voice was muffled and barely understandable.

Lucas laughed and rubbed his lover’s back, resting his cheek atop Will’s curly head with a contented sigh of his own. “So, you are happy to see me.”

Said as a tease to make Will smile, only Lucas's deep, beautiful voice had a waver in it and Will knew his baby was very close to tears at their reunion.

"Happy to see you?" He kissed Lucas's mouth emphatically, then cupped that pretty face in both hands, loving the pink flush painting elegant cheekbones and how Lucas's dark blonde hair, strewn with glistening silver, dipped over his forehead, slightly obscuring one eye. He was simultaneously so beautiful and endearing that it defied belief.

Will sighed, "Oh honey, you have no idea! I missed you so bad - I just can't even find a single word that would properly express it." Will felt a hot trickle of his own tears flowing down his cheeks.

Lucas nuzzled their faces together fondly and then kissed each teardrop before they could slip off of Will's stubbled chin. "Now, then, don't cry, little mouse…I'm right here. I have you."

But Lucas was also sniffling and some of his tears were dripping onto Will. So Will laughed brightly, adoringly.

"You're cryin' too, silly," he accused lovingly. His accent flared up like it had never been covered over in an attempt to be taken more seriously.

Everything about him was naked with Lucas.

"True. I've fogged my glasses up," Lucas chuckled. He took them off and set them aside, blinking like a cute owl.

"For goodness sake, darlin'," Will smiled, intoxicated by him, "just where do you get off bein' so damn cute?"

"Uhmm, I don't know about all that," said Lucas shyly.

He kissed Will's mouth longingly and added in a husky tone, "you are so very beautiful, sweetheart. And I've missed the sound of your lovely voice. I haven't been myself without you."

Their kisses started to build in frequency and ardor, and they kept whispering little reassuring and affectionate words to each other between each one.

"*Still* cryin'," Will purred, kissing Lucas's wet cheeks as they automatically moved towards the bed. "My sensitive, big, strapping man."

"I can't help it," Lucas admitted with another adorable sniffle. "I guess I'm just wired-hard to need you with me and to take care of you."

His little lapses in English phrasing were so precious that Will was in no mood to correct him, even all in good fun. He wanted to kiss Lucas' funny phrases and everything else about him. And so he would.

"No complaints here," Will assured him as desire roughened his voice. "So long as I always get to take care of you right back. Starting…hmmm….*now*."

Quickly, with a seductive smirk, Will whipped off his own Henley before doing the same to Lucas' shirt and sweater.

"*God*, you're sexy, Lucas," Will gasped, staring at his hairy chest and cute, soft tummy, his strong biceps and gorgeous forearms… those enormous hands and what they could do to him…

"*You* are," Lucas insisted bashfully, as usual, giving Will a coy look and a small, sweetly self-conscious smile as he undid both of their jeans and helped Will to shimmy out of his.

With a knowing smile of his own, Will hooked his fingers into Lucas's jeans and yanked them down playfully, along with the older man's boxers.

"That's much better," Will said, voice lust-drenched and needy.

Lucas moaned in arousal that was also more than evident by his impressive hard-on throbbing for Will, making the younger man's mouth water.

How had he even endured the trip away? Now that they were back together like this, he couldn't imagine parting again.

And hell if Will was going to accept all this magical, pure love he couldn't begin to deserve and not make Lucas know how loved he was in return; he wanted to give Lucas such pleasure, make that gorgeous body tremble and sing with it. If he could make it so that Lucas felt nothing but total bliss at all times he fucking *would,* and so in the moment, Will dedicated himself to at least making his man feel as good as was humanly possible.

Luckily, he knew that was pretty damn good.

Lucas lifted him right off the ground and Will moaned, wrapping his legs around Lucas's waist.

"*Fuck*, darlin'," Will said in a broken voice, his own cock so hard he couldn't really even think straight. "You're so big and strong."

He couldn't care less if he was talking like a shameless porn performer. It felt good.

"I like picking you up, and I like doing *this*, too," Lucas grinned before laying Will on the bed and climbing on top of him, laying sweet siege to Will's lips with so many kisses, Will quickly lost count.

"Have I mentioned that I'm addicted to kissin' you, baby?" Will grinned so hard his cheeks hurt when they had to pull back very temporarily to breathe.

"Are you sure you don't need to rest after your flight?" Lucas asked in a belated rush of sheepishness at his own lustful haste. "Do you need a nap first, skat? I can wait…"

"I mean…yeah and no," Will giggled, entranced by Lucas's incomparable sweetness. "Why don't we suck each other off? Then I'll take a nap. And if you're sleepy enough too, you can snuggle me and be my big spoon."

“I wouldn’t miss out on *that* for the world,” Lucas declared whole-heartedly. He then added, while kissing Will’s neck, “darling, you should have let me pick you up at the airport…”

“Naw, babe, it was better this way.” Will exposed more of his neck, tipping his head back with a delighted sigh at the feeling of Lucas’s wonderful kisses. “I needed the drive home to think and, well, kinda get back to bein’ my regular self again. Thank you for understandin’.”

“Always,” Lucas answered seriously. “Always, always, Will. Anything you need. That’s what I am here for.”

Will looked up at him with wide, wet eyes and a wobbly smile. “Well, then I guess I gotta find some kinda way to make myself stop wantin’ more and better for you than a mess like me. It’s not like I can help wantin’ to be all over you all the time, no matter how afraid I am that I’m not worthy of you.”

“‘*Not worthy,*’ such nonsense,” Lucas chided in a sexy and quite “dad”-ish tone that went right to Will’s dick. “Yes, you’re more than worthy, you are my sweetheart, and I’ll love you forever. I don’t say it lightly, you know.”

“Yeah, honey I do know that.” Will kissed Lucas’s neck, nibbling and then biting firmly until Lucas writhed above him with a deeper moan and a few choice Danish comments that sounded deliciously dirty.

“I know,” Will repeated. “And I’m so happy here with you, the world seems brighter and I feel like I can be a better man, at least, for you. Here, let me show you, if you don’t mind,” he grinned more flirtatiously.

As he turned them over and straddled Lucas, grinding slowly against his lover, Will added, “let me show you exactly how I love you…how I’ll always love you.”

And Lucas did, though he corrected Will once again on needing to be “better.” Soon after, all conversation had been swallowed up in the heat of their reunion, and about a half hour later they dozed together, wrapped up so snugly that all trouble seemed (and even in his happy glaze, Will knew the operative word was “*seemed*”) a million miles away.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Hannibal makes a successful *exit* from undesirable accommodations, then makes a beeline for Will. Meanwhile, Will is torn between many different emotions on seeing Hannibal again…but he’s finally going to have to decide what to do about it, and how to deal with being madly in love with two nearly identical and yet completely different men. 🖤🌹❤️‍🔥

the embers

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*All wrongs do me right,*
I dig my nails in dynamite
I might go off in the night
And I'll fend the bite
What am I supposed to do, but sink my teeth in you?
I'll starve without you on my lips, I'll die without the taste of it
What am I supposed to be when you sink your teeth in me?
'Cause I live for the way you move, I'd die without the taste"
-Rezz feat. Dove Cameron, "taste of you"

A weekday visit would have found the diner sleepy and slow, and now that Will ventured out with *slightly* greater frequency, these would normally be his chosen times to stop in for coffee and pie. It had become one of his and Lucas' rituals to come by a couple of times during the week when it was quiet, and with the goal of eventually trying every one of the diner's twenty flavors of delectable homemade pie.

On the *weekends*, however, Will would usually rather teach Buster to meditate than show his face in the crowded diner, congested with regulars who worked during the week and even a smattering of tourists in the summer. It wasn't even spring, so winter's insistently overstayed welcome had the advantage of holding off out-of-towners; fishing was a Job's task best resigned to the masochists and the experts (Will was both). Nobody would choose this little cranny of the USA to spend their leisure time in early March, not when another blizzard was likely to arrive before a temp above 40.

Unfortunately, though, the town had only one diner and it was popular enough to render Saturday and Sundays an obnoxious clusterfuck of friends catching up, book club ladies chattering away, families with their kids clogging the tables up with their…*family-ness*… show-offs. Parading around as if having the "American Dream" family unit wasn't reward enough; they had to show everyone how *cute* their babies were. Will didn't blame the infants in their detachable carseat carriers who inevitably, not unreasonably, would cry loudly at some point. It wasn't *their* fault.

But he was still a misfit, even though he'd found another misfit to stand by his side and hold his hand. Sure, maybe combined, him and Lucas made up one healthy human being, but it would probably take a few years for Will to fully shake off the bitter thought patterns which had consumed him for so long.

He still remembered thinking he'd *never* be in a couple. The incoming threat of finding himself the lone single man of his tiny social set, the inevitability of distant and half-forgotten relatives sending those horrible Christmas postcards with pictures of all the fucking *babies* and their *dogs* (who were *not* as cute as Will's own dogs, but like the babies, appeared to have been bribed by good food and reliable care into representing the Perfect Family in

such a saccharine, insulting manner). No reasonable person drinking themselves into a tear-soaked crisis, crying to *Rudolph and Frosty* at 3am, wanted those damned cards on the fridge screaming *"Loner! You'll never belong with anyone!"*

Even though the diner was currently occupied by at least fifty percent Those Families, with their fresh-faced optimism, good-naturedly tired but never bedraggled, Will chose to come for coffee and pie. He was stir crazy, which for a homebody like him was unusual. But he needed a safe place to get out of the house and burn off a *modicum* of his nervous energy. There had been a feeling like a balled-up fist in his stomach since the news report of Hannibal's escape.

It felt disturbingly like he was terrified for his life and looking forward to a big, romantic date at the same time. But then again, this was no surprise. It was Hannibal all over. And here was Disaster-Will, feeling that same old throb of complicated revulsion and longing, just as predictable.

Lucas had asked why Will was so sure Hannibal would find him. After hiding his whereabouts and keeping a low profile, Will wasn't even notorious among the locals. Jack and Alana were clueless as to his place of residence, the way Will wanted it.

It was upsetting to know that being impossible to find would never stop Hannibal from finding him. This being somewhat difficult to put into words for Lucas, Will had settled for, "because he won't give up."

"Is it all he cares about?" Lucas had asked, staring at the tv with an expression most people might dismiss as blank. Will knew better.

As he quietly processed the jarring sight of Hannibal's mugshot on the screen and the even more anxiety-inducing fact that he was now on the loose, Lucas' eyes were wide, his lips slightly strained. Everything he didn't say for fear of making Will feel any worse was palpable in the air between them. Will's empathy made sure he could never feel less than one hundred percent of Lucas' jealousy, fear and anger towards Hannibal. His protectiveness and worry for Will, with not a single anxiety spared for himself. Precious man.

It was enough to make Will feel terrible for stressing him over his own past baggage. But for better or worse, his mind was now more crowded than the diner, holding every weird, deranged, optimistic, pessimistic, nihilistic and scarily confused emotion which his nemesis' escape had prompted. And the guilt over Lucas' worries and jealousy had to cram itself in among every other ghost in Will's noisy, disoriented, mess of a head.

He purchased a black coffee and a slice of S'mores Cream pie, and turned around with a steaming mug in one hand and a small plate of indulgent dessert in the other. Then he walked back to the table he'd claimed for himself, the small booth in the corner which was too snug for any of the groups who crowded around the place. His coat was still sitting on his chosen red faux-leather seat. He had made it back without spilling a drop of coffee, nor shattering the plate and marring the soft chocolate and whipped cream-marshmallow frosting with tiny shards of porcelain. However, the image of the potentially broken plate lodged in his mind, too easy to relate to.

What was that Hannibal used to say about a *fragile little teacup?* Hannibal never saw Will as that delicate teacup; but he seemed to regard their relationship as a pile of shattered porcelain, and hadn't been shy in repeating the metaphor. Will knew that the idea of fixing what was - in all reality - irreparable must be highly meaningful to Hannibal...but was that really the best way to describe their "love" (for lack of a better word)? Seemed like that thing kept *breaking* no matter how many times the pieces came back together like magic. Talk about exhausting.

Sighing, he slid into the booth, settling in for some people-watching through the window directly beside him. There was no excuse for gazing upon the “lovely Maine weather,” that’s for sure, not unless dirty snow and a forlorn, iron-gray sky were one’s preferred aesthetic. If Lucas wasn’t around, Will barely knew how he would have endured such depressing weather, stretched between Christmas and Easter in a long, dreary tapestry of *glum*.

The people-watching was mainly an excuse to be vigilant about Hannibal showing up, but truth be told he was satisfied after about half the pie slice that there was nothing but steady, slow streams of townsfolk and no cannibal sticking out like a sore thumb. Hannibal never blended in anywhere; he’d been born to stand out, but this place had to be the last place Will could imagine him acclimating seamlessly…unless it was the beat-down trailer parks he and his dad had migrated between when he was a kid down south.

A slight pining for that Louisiana heat, just because it was so vacantly chilly on this day, made him think of how warm Lucas was spooned up behind him in bed, softly snoring. His hair all messy and adorable. Will’s heart warmed up, too, at the mere thought. Soon he was staring out the window but seeing nothing but a romcom-worthy montage of recent memories that made his continued cynicism about finding happiness…well, more than a bit hypocritical. Still, at least Will was less grandstanding and tacky about being happy than Those Families. He really was mostly-happy.

A very faint sound of clothing shuffling against the fake leather pulled him out of his reverie. As he turned blandly to pick his coffee cup back up, there was Hannibal sitting directly across from him in the little, innocent and cute diner booth.

Hannibal should have looked a lot more out of place, Will would give him that (at least in his own thoughts), but *knowing* who he was looking at made the sight feel about as bizarre as it was.

“A little dramatic, don’t you think?” Will complained mildly, stabbing the pie with his fork, unprepared for the noise it made as it instantly speared the fluffy filling and smacked against the plate.

Time, space and his own awareness of reality felt slightly skewed and unnatural, like a doomed protagonist in a surreal sci-fi movie. This was Hannibal’s automatic effect on him, or maybe it was more intense than it used to be because it had been so long since they’d been together.

Too long. Not long enough.

They weren’t just in the same room. They were close enough that they could barely move their legs without touching.

“And you find that surprising?” Hannibal inquired cooly.

Normally, Will knew Hannibal would be annoyed by the rude clashing noise of cheap fork against worn-out plate, but since the action betrayed Will’s nervousness, Hannibal was amused instead.

It wafted from the older man’s achingly familiar presence, the smug, unearned confidence. This cocky son of a bitch. Some things never changed.

Will had missed all of these feelings, far too much.

He leveled Hannibal with a flat, unreadable gaze. “Touché. No, not surprising. Just aggravating and intrusive.”

“I might remark that calling my reappearance dramatic was rather dramatic of you.”

“Sure, you might, but not if you know what’s good for you.” Will bit back a smile as Hannibal gave into one with his amber eyes twinkling.

“I think we’re both well-aware that I can be *much* more dramatic than this.”

“But not any more repetitious, surely.”

Will took a bite of pie that he could no longer taste and washed it down with a sip of hot nothing formerly known as coffee. “C’mon, out with it. Why are you here? What do you want enough to wear a trucker’s cap, an Eagles t-shirt and jeans with holes in the knees? And to show your pristinely cultured ass in this greasy spoon diner where, I can assure you, your extravagant preferred delicacies are nowhere on the menu.”

Hannibal gave him an *“I’m enduring you patiently out of affection”* look. It was right on the edge of stern, and looked sexy as hell on him, just like everything did, even that stupid fucking hat that said *“Got Diesel?”* on it. It was plain obnoxious.

After a calmly appraising look, Hannibal decided, “You’re nervous. Using so many extra words for such a simple line of questioning.”

“*You’re* nervous,” Will countered in a steely tone. “Are you attempting to *evade* the simple line of questioning?”

“Heavens, no. Firstly, I am clearly here *‘Taking it Easy.’* It says so on my shirt.”

Will rolled his eyes.

The waitress came over; she was a friendly, fifty-something lady named Mona who Will generally favored in the establishment because she never had time to make full eye contact or engage in more than the most shallow, if sincere, small talk. She seemed to perpetually be jotting things down on her ordering pad, having caused Will to develop a fiction about her being a secret expose author or steamy romance novelist. His empathy only picked up “well-intentioned, optimistic” so who knew? He might be right.

At any rate, Mona barely registered Hannibal's appearance at all, even to mistake him for Lucas, which she probably did without even thinking there was another possibility. So, it seemed pretty random as to which town residents were or were not familiar with the face of *Hannibal the Cannibal*. Will just prayed his luck kept up, in that no one suddenly screamed and pointed, calling out the insulting epitaph and demanding that someone call 911 and Freddie Lounds.

The most Mona had to say to Hannibal was "Oh, I love that song," gesturing at his t-shirt and earning a bemused, yet appreciative glance from the killer. And of course, "What'll you have, hun?" between audible gum chewing that threatened the bounds of Hannibal's good will.

"I'll have what he's having," Hannibal smiled, anyway, maintaining a low-key, but not foreboding aura. Actually, not that far off from the shy, yet approachable nature that Lucas showed.

Which was a very uncomfortable comparison-realization that Will did *not* care to revisit any time soon.

"Sure thing, Sugar," said Mona to the notepad. She tucked it absent-mindedly into her pocket and was off again like a flash.

"See? Mona thinks I'm sweet," Hannibal noted in response to Will's silent fuming across the table.

"Mona thinks you're Lucas," Will grumbled.

Hannibal did not register a flinch or a gritting of the teeth at the name, but something deep, dark and heavy resonated in his eyes, still settled resolutely on Will. As if, just by showing up and trying the *"let's pretend nothing bad happened the last time we met"* routine, he'd eventually ease past Will's defenses.

As. If.

"You won't like what I got," Will said with a nod down at the finished plate of pie.

Will didn't like seeming eager to keep the conversation going, but lingering on the beat of that first mention of Lucas was too tense for him to manage longer than a few moments.

"It honestly does not matter; it is hardly as if there is a single item on the menu that would be healthy or based on ingredients originating in nature. I see the logic of jumping right to the most shamelessly indulgent fare. But in any case, food is the last thing on my mind at present."

Hannibal lavished Will in a longing, admittedly distracting look, and Will barked a derisive laugh that never made it to his pounding heart.

"Really? *You?* Food is the last thing on your mind. But everyone is potentially food, right? Including – especially me." He lowered his voice and fluttered his eyelashes while delivering this statement.

The “especially” bit was maybe admitting too much, like knowing he was Hannibal’s favorite victim, for all that was worth. He almost sounded *ever so slightly* flattered by the fact, but hell. If he hadn’t already been too obvious in the way he wore his hair pushed back from his brow to show off the forehead scar or any number of other small signs, Hannibal could probably *smell* the residual, idiotic infatuation and obsession on him. The toxic pride in being the only one Hannibal could neither predict, nor let go of. It was Will’s crazy, out in such prime form that Denmark almost seemed sane by comparison.

“Don’t be absurd, Will.” Hannibal seemed really insulted, which chafed at Will’s ragged resentment.

Will considered many replies as his anger built, approaching the red so fast it was an effort to practice self-control. So rather than using his words, he remained silent and picked up his knife, a blunt and harmless instrument, but good enough for a game of *Psycho Charades.*

With a sardonic glare at Hannibal, Will lifted the knife to his forehead and mimed dragging it across his forehead. Setting it down, he picked up his fork and pretended he was about to scoop out some brains to eat.

At this not-ideal moment, with Hannibal nailing Will to the wall in a scathing gaze, Mona came bustling back with the coffee, to refill Will’s cup and serve Hannibal’s first one.

Hannibal raised his eyebrows as if prompting Will to do something to repair how suspicious his little play-acting had potentially been to any staff or fellow diners who may have seen it. Will hated himself for reading the older man’s micro-expressions better than he’d retained the French he learned growing up near the French Quarter, or the Spanish he’d gotten A’s on in college.

With a smirk, Will said in a tone of sarcastic excitement, “And that’s why I love zombie movies!”

Mona was already gone again, and it was unlikely she’d noticed a damn thing before moving on. But Hannibal went on indicting Will with that hypocritical expression that hit Will like a blast from a nail gun, solidly annihilating his tiny reserve of forbearance against Hannibal’s…

Hannibal-ness.

Hannibal blew on his coffee, probably just to have something to do. Will smirked again in silent acknowledgement that Hannibal was anxious enough to forget adding sugar and cream to his coffee. He’d never seen Hannibal drink coffee black in the whole course of their friendship, in that other, long-lost life.

It sat queasy with excitement and dread in Will’s stomach that they needed so few words to communicate.

Hannibal, meanwhile, read Will's look and glanced at his coffee, blushing slightly. This prompted him to fix it up properly as if he really cared, but his slight irritation with Will remained evident.

“You said I’m not on the menu,” Will whispered self-righteously. “Need I remind you of a few notable quotes? How about *‘this disgusting, subpar soup is just* marination *to make you palatable, Will’?* Or another of my favorite little bon mots, *‘Jack, I think it was you who first suggested getting into Will’s head*.' You know, funny enough, if I was about to do *that* to someone I cared for, I don't think I would be in the *mood* for cheesy, goddamn puns. But *hey*, I'm not you. So."

“You’ve maintained your talent for holding grudges,” Hannibal said frustratedly.

“Hmm.” Will nodded. “Only the really petty things, like you know. Literally anything you did to me since we met. And now you’re here, and I’m still waiting in eager anticipation to know why.”

“Even this,” Hannibal noted once Mona slid his plate of pie to him without even stopping before hurrying on to her next table, “Is far preferable cuisine to my former daily fare while I've been away from you. I’m convinced that Alana was trying to kill me with terrible food.”

Will gave a merciless laugh. “I guess it was worth a try. She could’ve evaded your deadly and foreboding *promise* that way. And, it would have been pretty fucking funny.”

Hannibal probably did not appreciate Will’s use of jazz hands while referring to his “promise” to kill Alana someday. His jaw finally tensed, *just* barely.

“Right now, I don’t care about promises to anyone else, Will. I'm here for you, if it wasn’t obvious. Gutter-mouth.”

“If it wasn’t obvious? Be still my heart, you incorrigible old romantic,” Will snarked. “You are so right, I should just read your mind so that you never have to embarrass yourself by admitting that you have stupid, frail, human emotions, like an actual person. Just imagine if I’d developed that talent early on instead of a blindspot for you that nearly cost me everything on multiple occasions and hollowed me out perilously by the time you put yourself away, just to wait a while, spring yourself, show up here dressed as Marky Mark, and tell me it’s obvious why you did.”

“Really, Will.” Hannibal chuckled. “When you put it that way, of course it sounds ridiculous.”

“Yup. That’s because it *is*, Hannibal.” He whispered the older man’s name, briefly leaning across the table, thumping an accusatory index finger on the surface.

It didn't surprise him that Hannibal was clearly too pleased with the sound of his first name rolling off Will's tongue to mind the finger-tapping. As a matter of fact, he appeared momentarily torn between staring at Will's lips or his hand.

No, Will wasn't *surprised* by any of this, but he did like it, helplessly. So he kept complaining. “And you’re scolding me for cussing. Like an elementary school hall monitor. Gonna cave my skull with a thesaurus later, punish my naughty tongue? How about…Lambs' Tongue en Papillote with Duxelle Sauce? For when you're done and it's finally time to make my proud debut.”

Hannibal placed a hand over his heart, mirroring Will's own sarcastic antics, and setting the fork down on his plate, clearly as uninterested in food as he'd stated. "You remembered my recipe from all those years ago."

"It's a handful of years, don't start picking out our wedding plates."

"I'll hold off for now," Hannibal remarked with a prim cheeriness that really deserved a good *slap.* "In the meantime, I shall simply state that I can conceive far, *far* better uses for your wicked tongue, Will Graham. Not least of all since you speak French with that sensuous, irresistible Creole inflection."

Will did not like those implications, nor the seductive glint in Hannibal's eyes (shameless!), and *definitely* didn't like the little gritty waver that came into his deep voice when he said Will's full name.

"Are you trying to *flirt?* Because if so, you're horrible at it," he lied (because, fool that he was, of course Hannibal's amorous words affected him). "But then, I think I remember that, too."

Hannibal swallowed a bite of pie with a look of relief that it was palatable.

"I was not consciously flirting with you back in those days. Assuming you are referring to our original – what was it Alana called it? - ah, a courtship."

"And would that this was the cannibalistic Jane Austen novel which lives rent-free in your mind," Will retorted, "But sadly, this is real life. You hurt me, you ruined my life multiple times and now what? Just *tell* me. Are you afraid to tell me whatever you actually came here to do?"

"Entirely possible."

Hannibal's cheekbones had never looked more sleek and chiseled, hat be damned. His lips seemed too plush and pretty to be real, his voice too cruel.

It was all coming down on Will in a pummeling waterfall from which there was no escape, but that didn't mean he had any intentions of showing how near he was to drowning.

"It can't be anything nice, then. Is that how *friends* treat each other?"

"There's hardly any point addressing it as such, since you are only being cynical and sarcastic. Hardly productive and not at all conducive of my opening up."

"You're a lot better at opening *me* up. Or…at least you used to be."

"You know, Will, it's really quite astounding. Even at your worst – insulting me, hiding behind walls of self-righteous petulance and foul language – you have a uniquely charming impact on me. It is quite infuriating."

"Oh, I hate to inconvenience you."

“Ironic, since you only *exist* to inconvenience me.”

“Okay.” Will scowled. “So, you're here because you’re overcome by my charms and entangled in erotic fervor, supposedly. Sorry, am I over-stepping?”

“Erotic fervor?” Hannibal smirked. “No, we both know you’re not over-presuming anything. Just as we both know you are not as impervious and saintly as you pretend to be.”

“I never pretended to be a saint. Ever.” Will scowled and flagged Mona down, putting in an order for an *Irish* coffee this time. Clearly, he was gonna need it.

“And for you, dear?” Mona asked, pen moving almost as fast as the thought trains on Hannibal’s mind tracks.

“The same for me once again,” Hannibal replied crisply. Once she had gone again, he said to Will, “Alcohol was a good idea. Why not ease the flow of a difficult conversation?”

“*Your* ability to get through this emotionally intact is not my concern,” Will warned.

A flash of anger and maybe even anguish flared in Hannibal’s normally enigmatic eyes. Will swallowed back a wave of nausea at the thought that Hannibal might already know about Lucas. Who *knew* how long he’d been lurking or how much research he’d done? Hannibal was smart enough to make entire stories gel with minimal evidence. All Will could do at the moment was internalize his protective worries over Lucas, maintaining a sturdy suit of armor. He couldn’t show weakness, not if he was going to hold his own in this confrontation.

He had made that mistake often enough in the past. Even now, the natural urge to open up to Hannibal was strong enough that he required a dose of whiskey to hold off.

Instead of letting this be Hannibal’s opening to begin discussing the Danish doppelganger elephant in the room, Will plunged onward.

“Anyway. So, you’re here because you have an *inconvenient* mixture of feelings towards me. That’s a bit of convoluted messaging, you have to admit.”

“Not that you care?” Hannibal inquired.

He’d managed to eat the rest of his pie and finish his coffee, as well as the complimentary ice water that had been provided as soon as he sat down. Will knew it wasn’t even filtered, never mind imported mineral water from some rare Italian spring. Even so, much like eating the bare minimum to hold off horrendous headaches and hunger pangs, staying hydrated was not optional.

It was not how Will would act after breaking free from captivity, during which he’d been forced to eat food he hated. Anyone would expect Hannibal to order a burger or a steak, at least, even in this place. But instead, his old nemesis seemed to have been pared down to survival mode. Hell if Will didn’t desperately want to know why.

“No, of course I don’t care,” he lied again, glad he’d never been religious, given the number of times he was going to have to tell falsehoods today. “Why should I? No.”

Hannibal gave him a tiny smirk, getting some of his usual stamina for sass back. Will tried not to feel pleased at the sight. What the fuck was wrong with both of them? Opposite sides of the same idiotic-crazy coin, or one big ball of crazy-stupid love yarn in which they were both hopelessly trapped, intertwined against their will?

"That was convincing." Hannibal continued smoothly, moving the salt and pepper shakers around for no good reason. He *was* nervous. "Do you intend to call Jack Crawford and alert him to my presence here?"

"And my presence here," Will said, snorting a laugh. "Don't forget that. But even if maintaining my own privacy weren't one of my actual concerns, *eh*…"

The Irish coffees arrived and Will almost dove for his mug, gratitude spilling over his disposition.

"Yes?"

He glanced up at Hannibal. "Calling Jack sounds boring. Don't you think?"

Hannibal smiled for real and Will tried in vain to keep his heart a solid block of ice where he was concerned.

"Indeed," the Ripper agreed. "Are you flirting with me?"

Will lifted the drink to his lips with a sneer. Steamy heat, smelling of chocolate, brandy, and Guinness liquor, sugary-spice flavored courage and stability (*faux*-stability but who was counting at this point), wafted up, momentarily clouding his vision.

"Wait. You'll burn your tongue," Hannibal said, clucking his own and reaching out, placing his hand quite gently on Will's wrist.

Will glanced down at the strong, familiar hand on his own slender wrist. Hannibal was less tanned now, of course, having grown pale in prison; it was a bit sad and Will couldn't help how his heart sagged, also to see his former friend so skinny. Hannibal was, however, still quite muscular, even with a leaner build, and Will had to be constantly on guard. The Ripper was a dangerous adversary. Will should not, for example, melt at some pretense of care-taking and the deep, ever-humiliating temptation of Hannibal's manipulative touch.

The whole *some things never change* observation had been easier to take when it was about how Hannibal would forever be an asshole. Realizing that this did not matter at all when it came to Will staying in love with him was a pill so hard to swallow that he feared choking if he thought about it for longer than a few seconds at a time.

All the same, he gave Hannibal an accidentally tender half-smile, then blew on his coffee to cool it.

"You didn't just disappear into nowhere," Will resumed as Hannibal drew back with what he recognized as some difficulty. Speaking over the scream inside him at that realization, he

tacked on, “Hope you didn’t leave any clues as to where you went. Because all I need is Jack Crawford, the FBI and a gaggle of reporters showing up on my front porch.”

“You wouldn’t want to leave this place,” Hannibal concluded, icily.

“I mean, not at the moment, no, I’ve come to feel…content…here.”

“I see.”

“Listen, since neither one of us need to attract undue attention, I would suggest that dueling in town square is not an option. If you came here to permanently settle old scores, I’d advise you to think better of it. Whatever drove you to escape, surely it wasn’t with the design of going right back into your *accommodations* a few days later.”

“You are far more to me than an old score. However inconvenient it may be to *you* to admit that. Tell me, Will, do you feel as if our relationship had been resolved in a definitively satisfying manner, prior to this reunion?”

“*Yup*.” Will ventured a sip of his Irish coffee now, finding that it had cooled down slightly. If only he could do the same…“Seemed pretty appropriate to me. Still does,” he added.

“Well,” Hannibal said with such an unmistakable hurricane in his eyes that Will felt his soul quake. “Perhaps you have found resolution by moving on. I can see the appeal of an appropriate life. You might choose a man who resembles me but isn't me, and move in together. You might even be inspired by this *romance* to take a little trip to Denmark and take care of his enemies. But is that really the equivalent of you and I finally exploring what we could share together? Have you deluded yourself to that extent? I assume, of course, he wants me out of the way.”

“*He* has a name,” Will corrected. He knew there was no amount of liquor in the world to ease the terrible discomfort of this conversation. “You know that it’s Lucas. Any resemblance is purely coincidental. Actually, I had to work to get past that at first. Only briefly. He’s nothing like you.”

“I agree. Outside of the physical resemblance, of course. I would have to be the greatest simpleton alive to accept your explanation of it as a coincidence. Please, Will. I know I’ve let you down numerous times, but don’t insult what we’ve been to each other. Throw it away if you insist, but be honest about it.”

Will sat back, belatedly realizing how far he’d been leaning over the table, towards Hannibal. His heart felt heavy enough to crush the insubstantial fortress of his ribs. He’d never needed to be more careful, never felt less capable. Hannibal could still strip him naked of skin and pretense with a single look.

“I'm not your property,” he stated. "And I deserve the life that I chose for myself."

“Said with such authority,” Hannibal said. “Are you in charge of belonging, as a concept for all mankind?”

“I’m in charge of me.”

“So you don’t belong to Lucas, then? Or he to you?”

Will sighed sharply. “You think *we* –” He pointed between himself and Hannibal – “should still belong to one another? I don't live in your meticulously structured world anymore, and I certainly don’t follow your rules.”

“Is it so repulsive to consider that if you were with me intimately, you might follow where I would lead?”

“Yes, yes, it is.”

Hannibal pressed his lips together, then let out a sigh long enough to rival Will’s own from moments before. He tapped his foot as if he suddenly couldn’t hold still. As if the world had just released a downpour of lemon juice all over the open wound of his love for Will.

“Thank goodness for Lucas, then,” he snipped. “Your hero.”

Will could have slit Hannibal’s throat, but he would not have been able to clearly state only one reason for doing so.

“If your references to Lucas were laced with one drop more of poison, you’d keel over dead, mid-sentence.”

“Can you blame me? I came all this way.”

The look on Hannibal’s face was so fake-angelic that Will had to take an extra long sip of his coffee to even hold back from punching him.

“At considerable risk to your own safety,” he concluded. “Spare me, I’ve heard this speech before. And don’t be a hypocrite, because you and I both know I’m not the only one you’ve said those pretty words to. The obsession, the blackmail, the lies and attacks…why should any of that give me the slightest impression of being special in your eyes? Because you’re here? *Ha.* Maybe Bedelia was busy.”

Hannibal closed his eyes and inhaled/exhaled several times using what Will recognized as mindfulness breathing.

“*And*,” Will continued undeterred, “you know about Lucas. You must have figured some part of it out back in your cell, or else why go to all this sudden effort? You could’ve waited forever for me to come back, just as long as I never replaced you.”

“You can’t replace me,” Hannibal said hotly. “Even with my lookalike.”

“I think you’d say anything to stop me from moving on and finding happiness on my own terms instead of yours. Both of us have been alone and miserable, and that’s how we’d be when your work was done, too. You’d use me up until you wore the shine off me, maybe a few *special hunting trips* later, I’d seem too much like every other would-be protege that let you down with my shortcomings. But *ohhhh*, no.” Will finished the last swig of coffee and

resisted slamming the mug down. “No, no, no. How dare I get over you? What’s wrong with me? You treat me so well.”

Hannibal was quietly beside himself. “The heroic Lucas would never treat you with such cruelty.”

“Actually, he calls me his hero and yes, or rather, no. He’d never be cruel. He would do anything rather than hurt me.”

After tracing his lower lip with his tongue and snarling minutely, as if Will had just come at him with a lit torch, Hannibal nodded.

“He’s everything I’m not.”

Will made hard eye contact with him. “Yes.”

“Well, what more could you possibly want?”

“Your worst quality isn’t your penchant for you-know-what. It’s not your dietary preferences. It’s being an ass. Are you really gonna play dumb?”

“In what sense?”

“If you insist on being willfully obtuse…or maybe you just built a new brick wall around your feelings over the last ten or fifteen minutes?”

Hannibal fumed. “My feelings for you have certainly not brought me joy, nor even safety."

“Your poor, delicate, crystal feelings, so much more important than everyone else’s.” He extended his hands widely as his voice became a little higher. “So careful to protect your own emotions, so they stay perfect and sparkling, clean, untouchable. Great job. When we met, I was doing fine, except for being sick and exhausted. By the time you were done with me, I was the mushed-up, stepped on mess of some first grader’s paper mache art project.”

“Are you saying that in terms of emotional maturity, I am a first grader? And that you were my ‘science project’?”

“You could never keep hold of me long enough for the novelty to wane. How tedious you would find me if we were together long enough for that. Then of course. Dinner. Waste not, want not.” He heard himself harping on his own painful insecurities and hated how stupid it sounded.

“And I am supposedly the one who is insane,” said Saint Hannibal. As if he’d never thought about getting rid of Will.

As if it wasn’t the first damn thing he’d done as soon as Will “let him down” by not taking a side between him and Jack quickly enough. Well, Will had the scars to show that Hannibal was never going to be patient with him for his inability to measure up.

He didn't know who he resented more, Hannibal, or that Other, Perfect-Will who apparently lived in his enemy's illustrious mind palace, just hanging out and being better than Will all the time. Will felt a sudden pain in his jaw and realized he'd been pressing his teeth together too hard. He unclamped them, grateful he hadn't bitten his tongue (this time).

With a cold smile, he resumed, "You aren't crazy. You're a narcissist with a bloodlust and a love of savoring petty victories."

"What does that make you?"

"I don't know. Thought I had space and time to find out, but I guess not. You kind of interrupted me with your grand return."

Hannibal ignored him this time and got up all of a sudden. Will watched as he made his way to the front counter.

Will was in such a daze, not from the liquor in the coffee but from all the fucked up ways he felt at the moment. It took him watching as Hannibal took a wallet out of his *jeans' pocket* to realize the older man was paying for their pie and coffees.

"Really," he said with unconvincing, sarcastic fondness, coming up beside Hannibal at the register. "You shouldn't. Let me split it with –"

"Aw, honey, I don't think your sweetie here is gonna hear of it," said another waitress named Sue-Lynn, smiling at them both with the obvious assumption that Hannibal was Lucas. "You're always paying for his breakfast and now he's found a way to treat you instead. It's so cute!"

"Adorable," Will grumbled. "Thanks, Sue-Lynn. Have a good one."

He waited outside on the porch. And kept thinking of the blank expression on Hannibal's face as he handed over the cash for their meal and allowed this woman to believe he was Lucas. To think he was Will's lover, as if that was possible. Will swallowed hard. He rubbed a hand over his face and paced around the old-fashioned front porch until Hannibal reemerged, stony-faced.

"You seem distraught," Hannibal noticed, "Considering that you won the first round, by my estimation."

"Did I?" Will asked, feeling a little sick.

He rested a hand on one of the beams supporting the porch and shook his head, failing to get rid of the queasy sensation of feeling badly for Hannibal. Almost feeling bad that he couldn't make Hannibal happy and be Perfect-Will for him after all this time apart.

He knew how much Hannibal wanted the person he thought he saw in Will, and it cut him deeper than mere empathy to know he was in the process of breaking Hannibal's heart once again. At least they'd always be relatively equal on that count.

Will knew they both broke each other by the end of every time they tried this – *this* – whatever it was. This *being in the same room* without knowing what to do about it, fight, fuck, run away together, run *from* each other. No wonder Will felt as messed up as if they'd never been apart at all. The memories of his past encounters with Hannibal were numerous indeed, but he somehow recalled each one with perfect, tormentingly accurate precision.

All of which added up to him exhaling, long and weary, then glancing over his shoulder at an offended, but baffled and curious Hannibal.

Then Will's heart hurt a little to see how tenacious Hannibal's regard was. Even if Hannibal couldn't love without being utterly sadistic, no one could accuse him of giving up easily. Instead of putting it down to selfishness, as usual, Will thought he felt genuine, sincere longing in the air between them. He knew some of it, despite his best efforts, was from him, but the other part of it…well, that was from Hannibal.

Hannibal, who was *devouring* him with his angry eyes, as if even arguing like wet cats with their claws out was better than not seeing Will at all. Because he'd risk it *all* just to rest eyes on Will.

As if being near Will was Hannibal's only version of coming home, even if that home was desperately in need of repairs and might not weather another storm.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Will's mood softens, the longer he's in Hannibal's company. They take a walk together and talk things over more sensitively. 🥹❤️ And later, a flashback will show what happened the first time Hannibal saw Lucas, while sneaking around the night before reuniting with Will...

Nowhere left to run

"If i can't make you cry, i'll make you bleed." *-Fair Play*

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"So, what now?" Hannibal asked softly.

"*Now*," Will ventured, turning his collar up and glancing towards the nearby forest on the edge of town. "Now, I guess we walk for a bit. The day's actually turned out…not decent, exactly, but less bleak than I expected."

Hannibal could have jumped on the chance to make that a metaphor, but he ignored it, perhaps as being too cheesy, even for him. Or too much to invest much hope in.

"Lead the way," Hannibal suggested.

He froze midstep, remembering that one of them had certainly said the same thing to the other in Florence, when they left the Uffizi gallery to walk outside and probably-kill-each other.

It would be understandable for Hannibal to resent what Will had done mere minutes later, but since bonesaws beat knives any day in the "Rock Paper Scissors" game of murder attempts, Will felt pretty dignified and sure in having more cause for resentment. A *lot* more. That knife jab in the street was so feeble and transparent, it was almost a cry for help, like Will was begging for Hannibal's attention, love, approval, but if those were not available, he would settle for blood.

Tears. Blood. What was the difference? That night, dying on the kitchen floor beside Abigail, Will heard blood raining outside on the cold Baltimore sidewalk. He thought he heard Hannibal's footsteps walking away with a frigid echo into the future where he would have nothing more to do with even the memory of Will. Hannibal's heart seemed harder than the concrete on which he eluded Will's slippery hold on him.

First, Will had listened to those footsteps until Hannibal was so far he knew they were only echoing in his mind as unconsciousness creeped in, blood pouring out on the floor. Then, he'd continued the same love chase, traveling to Lithuania and Florence. Following Hannibal like a dumb, lovesick puppy thinking *this can't be what he meant, there must be some other explanation, he must love me, he must have made a mistake.*

He could easily have breathed his last under Hannibal's saw, to have his brain eaten by the man he loved and the man who must hate him terribly to do something so –

Except, even in the blur of whatever drugs Hannibal used to keep him pliant (arousal, rage in Will's memory, too vivid, to this day), Will had known the attempt was not out of hate, but unbearable love. Which did not excuse Hannibal's actions in the least.

So Will froze up as well and took the time to level the older man with a good, old-fashioned, expertly honed glare.

“I cannot undo the past, Will. Yet, there is so much I might still do to change the future. So much we might make the most of in the present, instead of revisiting old–”

“Oh, give me a break,” Will snarked. He did lead the way, then, following the road a short distance before it turned to a dirt path.

They disappeared into the woods and out of the main thoroughfare as Will added with a sneer, “Maybe watch your fucking mouth for once, if you intend to make this time any different from the past. Making me remember the more brutal examples of your regard is not doing you a single damn favor. Meaning I’m not likely to do so either.”

“Except for curiosity, I suspect,” Hannibal noted. “Can you really say you don’t care what I have to say?”

“We need to get a couple of things straight, or I won’t get a chance to hear you out. There are risks I’m not willing to take, and I’m sure you know what I mean.”

“Yes, indeed. *Who.”* Hannibal paused, then added drily, but as if he spoke the most impressive poetry, “Tell me, how is the placebo?”

Will groaned. “His *name* is Lucas.”

They kept walking. Will was grateful that the woods stretched on for a bit. Even then, he wondered if a couple of miles between here and home would be enough to figure out between them…just what the hell they were doing.

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Hannibal had the grace to remain silent for a few minutes, despite Will feeling the seethe of his angry frustration about Lucas, like a live wire flickering with dangerous sparks between them.

They still walked in perfect time, steps unchoreographed, not even heeded in particular, both of them being so distracted. But they were still components of the same machine, wherein without one of them or the other, the entire endeavor would shut down after forgetting how or why to function properly.

It felt, crazily, like they were meant to be together. Maybe in some other life, or in this one – if a dozen or so miracles came to pass.

Hannibal took off the terrible hat and enjoyed the sunbeams shining through the treetops, warm and pure, but dwindling. Somehow, it was already late afternoon…twilight was impending. Whatever the thing was that pulsated between them. It would never be pure. Warm? No. Hot, like fresh blood, thick and choking.

Being around Hannibal once again had Will feeling like he was dying, yet had seldom felt so alive, all at the same time. Hotter than a fever and sicker, dirtier than any artist's most depraved concept of hell.

"You've gone so far inside now, Will."

His wistful tone shifted something in Will's heart. He glanced over with a small nod. "You could always tell."

They kept walking as Hannibal basked in the rays that turned his eyes into bright amber blown-glass, utterly stunning.

For once, the older man seemed oblivious to his own absurd attractiveness. He was much more absorbed with ruffling his short hair. The sun gleamed down on the new strands of silver that had increased since last they met.

"You're worried about your *hair?*" Will asked with an attempt at friendly (ish) amusement and incredulity.

"As you may imagine, I was none too pleased to lose control over my own appearance."

"Of course. Anyone would be, but *you*…" Will drifted off with no need to complete his sentence - the rueful smile on his face finished it just fine.

You're too vain for that. But did Hannibal read the rest as plainly? Because Will just as clearly thought, *You're too gorgeous.*

With a sad sigh, Hannibal elaborated, "The white jumpsuit was bad enough. But not being able to control my diet…"

"While wearing a white jumpsuit," Will put in, teasingly "serious."

Hannibal grimaced. "Exactly. Losing control of what I could or was forced to put in my stomach was the worst. Never forget that diet impacts on skin, figure, all manner of priorities. I can only imagine the cumulative damages which I still have not had the heart to address in the mirror."

"The cumulative damages?"

"I'm not going to pretend that I am the same man, at least, not physically. I was grossly sabotaged. Having my hair cut by a supposed barber, who I more than half suspected to be a real-life Sweeney Todd…that was only insult to injury. There was hardly anything left to ruin the last time he dared 'trim' my abused hair."

Will coughed to obscure a hearty laugh. "I had to wear an *orange* jumpsuit, remember? I know about indignity. And rather than getting shorn by the demon barber of fleet street, my hair got wildly overgrown."

"It looked beautiful," Hannibal insisted, making Will blush. "You are perfect, always."

Will could not possibly meet his eyes in such a moment, couldn't imagine having the naked, raw nerve of confronting those formerly unreadable eyes when they were so open. He gave an honest answer, but not the first that came to mind. His first thought was something made out of three words that hurt to swallow back.

His tone was as light as his thoughts were the opposite. "I must admit…I had never imagined looks to be among your worries."

Hannibal held back a sharp tree branch to allow Will to keep walking unhindered. As Will averted his too-bright eyes, Hannibal kept watching him like a starving man who had stumbled upon a feast of the only food capable of sustaining him.

Will knew, because he could feel that heady, flattering gaze remaining on him steadily, obsessively, just to stare at Will's back, bundled in a black winter's coat, and his curls, tousled by the wind.

He had always struggled to accept this obsession as true - that a powerful, nearly invincible man who laughed in the face of God himself and broke every rule, law and taboo in society had one weakness – and that weakness was *Will.*

"I don't come here in any way deluding myself, Will. I know I may seem to be a shadow of my former self–"

"Oh, on the contrary," Will cut him off. "You're unbelievable."

"I know that. Would you mind being more specific?"

Will nodded. He kicked aside a damp twig for no other reason than to blow off a tiny amount of anxiety; it flittered off and cleared his path. Stepping within kissing distance without even meaning to, he said right to Hannibal's surprised expression, "A shadow of your former self? Hannibal. On the contrary."

There were other words interwoven with the surface-level ones, as their eyes met and held, pieces clicking together with a sense of relief.

You're so much easier to talk to now. I actually feel like you give a damn about making this work. I feel how much you missed me. I feel how much I missed you, that I'm scared you'll stay and scared you'll leave.

Hannibal nodded again. "Thank you."

"Let's keep moving," Will said out of necessity, and pulled away with relief that he found himself able.

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"You're tense," said Hannibal after a few minutes.

Will nodded, stopping to lean on a nearby tree. He guessed it was easy to tell he was increasingly breathless, which could not be the result of a mild exertion like this walk. He

closed his eyes, nodded ruefully, pressed his thumb to the forehead scar, a gesture which had long since become something of an unconscious tic. Self-soothing. Stroking the remnant of a wound that would heal on the outside, just not inside. If Will's brain had ever recovered from knowing what Hannibal had once intended to do to it, Will sure couldn't tell.

The time was that these tangible memories kept him intact. He didn't need anyone to tell him it was goddamn crazy. That Hannibal was toxic a hundred times over. Impressively destructive and life-ruining, and that was if he liked you. If he *loved* you? A whole other kind of nightmare. One only Will had lived.

He caressed his scars from time to time, just because they were the gravity tethering him to the earth because otherwise – even since Lucas – he might simply disintegrate without Hannibal.

There was no Will-without-Hannibal. To such an extent that he sometimes marveled that there ever had been. It sort of seemed…scientifically impossible.

Simultaneously, of course, that was wrong. Fucked up. A sick joke.

"Tense," Will repeated.

He internalized the callout of Hannibal's outrageous presumption. For one thing, why bother arguing? It just wasn't like Hannibal was wrong, so whose fault was it, with so many chances and attempts to move on, if Will just *couldn't* and never had?

God. It *contented* him in some nauseating way that at least they had this in common. Mutually assured destruction? That was no longer a risk he was entitled to take if he so chose. There was Lucas waiting for him to come home, and he'd never betray that love by rushing into danger like he'd be the only one paying the price.

"All things considered, I'd say I've remained admirably calm," he added tightly.

Hannibal stood beside him at the precise distance one would call respectful. Like a broken spaceship stuck in an idiotic orbit around the dumbass planet that refused to shove him out of its gravitational pull.

It seemed futile and indulgent to feel angry when it would be like being pissed off simply because Hannibal was breathing. As long as Hannibal and Will both existed, it was going to be a problem for both of them. Unless, of course…there was some kind of a problem-solving strategy he could not currently see the shape of. But he hadn't given up hope, even if he was in no mood to spoil Hannibal with hope-bolstering truths.

"Problem-solving is hunting….a savage pleasure and we're born to it…a pleasure we can share."

He shivered.

"Are you really that concerned with appearances?" he began in an enigmatic tone, curious to see where his own verbal continuation of his mental tangent would go.

Opening his eyes, dark sage under the shadowy sky, Will made himself look at Hannibal, the way a cutter forces a blade across their wrist. Hell if he didn't feel that same old, queasy-dizzy rush when their eyes met. Worth the pain, and inextricable from it.

Hannibal's breath picked up pace a little, maybe not from Will's actual question, but the look with which he fixed him. "Perhaps less, now that you do not seem overly repulsed."

He stopped Will with a gentle – startlingly gentle – touch to his arm. Stepping closer, he swept a rumpled lock of hair back from Will's brow, revealing the scar as clearly as he had seen it upon their reunion. As if, since the wind had tousled Will's curls, he had missed being able to look upon his handiwork.

It was too much. If the scars were somehow holding the two of them together, it meant that their love adhered them together with pain. The sweetly terrible throb of an old wound; the way it brought back the horror, shock and agony of its birth onto the canvas of skin. There had to be more. He knew there was much more to love than suffering and sacrifice. But all the same, Will could never resist his touch.

Hannibal had obviously noticed Will's new habit of slicking his hair back, showing it all off, prideful of Hannibal's claim on him which no one else had earned, no one else had apparently deserved. Will didn't want anyone else ever to be worthy of this, to be cut and left to live, twice over. Many thousands of times more internally.

With an affectionate, proud smile, Hannibal *gazed upon* him, no other way to put it. Will was being gazed upon by the Chesapeake Ripper, and not the way it used to happen, which had been stolen glances, manipulated and thieving intimacies, lies upon lies and anything else Hannibal could think of in order to barricade his remaining defenses.

A thousand vines lined with sharp thorns wrapped around his heart and dug into the meat of Will's love, or his annoyingly undefeated need for Hannibal, that would be another way to put it.

Hannibal didn't need to touch him, or even to speak much if he was going to look at Will like that.

Overwhelmed without being able to hide it, despite knowing that Hannibal being open and honest was not the same thing as himself doing so, Will had let the windows behind his eyes blow the curtains so far they were irretrievable, and he had shown it all to the older man in an instant, just as it always had been.

The wicked ache of the power imbalance was now offset by an older and debatably wiser Will knowing his own strength as he never had back then. But he felt the thrum of erotic fascination as Hannibal easily played him, lifting the instrument of him ad beginning to pluck away at his hard-won stability, producing the same beautifully fucked up, hypnotic music as ever. He felt those beloved, much-feared and quite obnoxious hands drawing back and forth across him, strumming that fearful harmony which only they could produce together.

Will couldn't let this man anywhere *near* Lucas in good conscience. But what *else* could he do? First of all, Hannibal couldn't be trusted to remain at arm's (knife's) length if Will just

tried to send him away. And Will, fool that he eternally was, had no intention of hurting Hannibal in order to save Lucas unless this was the only option. If it was the only choice, yes, he would do what he must to protect Lucas, and he would never regret that. But he prayed Hannibal would not push him there.

There were other reasons, but they were (even) more selfish ones. If Will didn't see this through, which would inevitably mean allowing the two men to meet, he would never know the future "what might have been's," and he wanted to desperately, had to know them, had to be able to play them back like the rest of his all-time marathon click of countless screen reels in his memory, the Will and Hannibal show. Worse than any tragedy Shakespeare could contrive, twistedly hilarious, pathetically addictive.

"I'm not repulsed, which you already know is a ridiculous thing to say. But there's something here," Will said archly.

He mirrored Hannibal's motion, brushing at the sweetly, softly prickly silver hair that had his (former friend, nemesis, his everything, his future death? His *Hannibal)* so paranoid about not looking good.

"You aren't lying, you're just surprisingly deluded on the topic. But honestly." Will shrugged. "You look."

Hannibal raised his light brows, looking far too intensely into Will's searching blue gaze.

Will's heart thudded faster than he could keep up with. "Fine," he finished. "C'mon, let's keep going. This way."

***

"What has you so preoccupied now, Will?"

Will had never forgotten the thrall he went into when gulping Hannibal's rare, undivided attention down like stolen holy water. But now he tasted it again and that was a whole other kind of crazy.

He gave Hannibal the abridged answer: "I don't know. Just that I've never been religious, but several metaphors of that nature have come to mind just in the last fifteen minutes."

Hannibal bit back a smile, blushing when Will glanced back over his shoulder and caught him. Will could barely hold back from laughing, a bright, affectionate laugh.

"You uh…you are, and always have been a sadist," he said, trying to keep the conversation on track. "Your petty vengeances are nothing short of legendary."

"What was Denmark?"

Will snorted, rolled his eyes. "Not petty. They had it coming."

"That, I believe. I put my faith entirely in your flawless taste for judgment."

“Does your faith in me extend any further than that?”

“I hope so.”

“Gonna have to do better than hope.”

“You want a promise.”

“Yes. I will only ask you for one. I know that I won’t have to do more than that to hold you to it.”

Hannibal sighed. “I know the promise, of course.”

They had turned a corner and reached a half-thawed stream in a rather nice clearing. It was one of Will’s favorite places to come and think and had since become one of Lucas’ as well. Sometimes they sat there, on a fairly smooth and accommodating, large rock and thought together in silence, side by side.

Will recalled how easy it was for him and Lucas to coexist without either speaking, misunderstanding the other, or getting bored. Mind-reading wasn’t limited to his relationship with Hannibal. Lucas was the only other person who possessed the capability, though. Will had been a closed book all his life till meeting them.

“It really is pretty here.” Will took up his usual seat, grateful for the bracing evening chill and the reminder of Lucas, so strong in this place that his lover might as well be present.

Maybe he’d allowed some of Hannibal’s silly wistfulness under his skin, maybe he wanted to or it was so damn adorable on Hannibal that he gave in a little. Maybe he was impressed and grateful for this surreal, “open-book” version of Hannibal and felt a little too soft about it.

In any case, he patted the rock beside him when Hannibal only nodded and looked around at the clearing, doubtless carving out a special place for it in his memory palace.

“It’s alright, you can sit next to me.”

Hannibal glanced directly at his face for a moment, seemed to find no trick waiting there, and came over to take a seat. His small smile was sad, but suggested that the current situation was far better than he’d dared hope it might turn out.

“You spoil me, Will.”

“You’re not quite being sarcastic, so much as inquiring as to whether I’m throwing you a bone to soften the blow.”

“How unsurprisingly, yet delightfully astute you are.”

Will could also tell that there was no trace of sarcasm there. Hannibal truly delighted in his company, had just never learned to tolerate the vulnerability it implied, especially if he should ever put Will above being the Ripper. Or allow loving Will to matter more than remaking Will in his own image, evil deity that he was.

“I *could* have. I would have. Spoiled you.” Will turned his chin precisely and regarded Hannibal with his brows raised. “If you ever let me get close enough to take this further. To trust what we were, or are both feeling. I could have been…”

Hannibal went so far as to briefly touch Will’s hand with a whisper-soft tenderness like a freshly sharpened machete.

“A wonderful partner. As you would have been a good father. I took those chances away and stored them up in the vault of my own misconceived notions that I must protect myself from you. A you who could get close enough to love me, or to be a co-parent. I only risked it once, and then when I had snatched back the invitation, my sense of relief at averting disaster more closely resembled a swiftly building desire to die.”

Will shook his head, steely eyes turning away, although he scooped Hannibal’s hand in his own, finding their fingers and palms mutually cold but still made to fit together. Made to want this.

Tears escaped his eyes like the fleeing fugitives they were; Will ignored them knowing that Hannibal would not. Squeezing Hannibal’s hand, he said “Are you upset because…”

“Because I never granted you a promise before upon request?”

“Well, I never asked before.” Will must have failed to hide a tiny inner smirk, a feeling he mainly used to cushion the otherwise unbearable anxiety he felt.

But, it seemed, Hannibal was not appreciative of his “defense mechanisms.”

Hannibal shifted slightly further away, petulant, slipping his hand from Will’s but not leaving the shared space of their rock.

“Don’t gloat. It doesn’t become you nearly as much as you think it does.”

Will laughed sharply. “Oh? I think it does, huh? How dare I. Where do I get off? Do you really think I enjoyed my empathy disorder before you came along to make me so… recklessly desperate for the truth of you, or do you think I’m actually that vain?”

Hannibal looked up from the wounded-violent wince of sinking twilight reflected in the sludgy river. The distortion seemed apt, yet ironic.

“You aren’t. Actually that vain. I didn’t mean to imply that.”

“Oh, come on, Hannibal, just give it to me unfiltered. I can take it. I’ve had a lot worse.”

“What’s the unfiltered version, pray-tell?”

“Vain might be the wrong word. ‘Arrogant,’ I believe, was Jack’s chosen adjective at my trial.”

“Ah, yes. Jack Crawford. The very soul of all humility.”

Will put his hand over his mouth, failing to smother a genuine laugh that didn't happen to have any vitriol or fear in it.

"Shut up. Don't be cute while we're working this out. If we even can."

"Oh? Really? Cute?" Hannibal batted his eyelashes with drolly comedic aplomb. "Fair enough. In that case, I order you to stop being cute immediately."

"Jack was right."

"Ouch."

"You don't agree?"

Hannibal looked up at him with a wry half-smile. "I'm the wrong person to ask."

"Aren't you always, though. I'm arrogant when I know that I'm right. This is specifically flavored with the sour-salt-brine of also expecting not to be believed. Or trusted. Ever."

"We can start from a premise of trust. If you trust me, I'll trust you."

"Hannibal, is this some kind of point-proving expedition for you or are you in this?"

"I see that you think you are in love with this Lucas person. I trust that you believe that's real. I am here for you. Beyond you, I do not care about a single thing this world has left to offer me. If this means that I must endure levels of jealousy and humiliation that make me feel as if swallowing razorblades has become my new job, I invite you to ask yourself: why would I ever do such a thing merely to satisfy my stubbornness and ego on old scores?"

"It ought to matter that I'm in this, too." Will had nearly forgotten he'd been crying just a few minutes earlier, but new, hot tears trickled down his cold cheeks again. "Do you think it'd be fair of you to expect that I remained romantically faithful and devoted to you based on nothing but assumptions that *maybe* you cared for me? Is it that insane to you that I'd meet someone like Lucas and want to experience love like that? Do you –"

"Please, before you ask if I don't think you deserve such love." Hannibal moved closer, grasped Will's hand and refused eye contact with sullen conflict blazing in his averted eyes. "Don't. If you saw me with someone, like you're with Lucas, how would you feel? Genuinely."

"I'd feel the way you do. But it's not really the same thing because there is only one Lucas. No matter who else you fell for or wanted to be with, they would never be him."

"And neither will I. Lucas deserves special treatment, according to you, that's reason enough for me to break the rules. Only, only for you, Will. Ever."

Will shifted closer, his voice dipping low. "I can't promise you anything. I don't know where this...*attempt* is gonna land when we've seen it through."

“With you and I together in some incarnation?” Hannibal shrugged elegantly. “Otherwise, I fail to see the point. And I’m not quite ready to relinquish hope regarding something I’m this determined about. Perhaps there is a way we can all…”

He trailed off, allowing theories to fill the air between them. The same theories Will had been running through in his head since the day he met Lucas, although he’d never imagined that Hannibal would be here. He entered into those fantasies with the understanding that Hannibal was a lost cause. If Hannibal was anything but, it changed what Will was, redefined what they could become.

“Perhaps we can. Your talent for twisting my mind in knots remains undiminished, by the way.”

Hannibal’s lips quirked as his eyes twinkled, but Will saw the worry and hope warring in his gaze, and it changed his estimations about every damn thing he knew and where it might lead.

With a sly, smug nod which expressed “why thank you,” Hannibal acknowledged his continued ability for fucking Will’s mind eight ways from Sunday.

Will took out his phone, dialed Lucas, and hoped he wasn’t making a terrible mistake. While the phone rang, he felt Hannibal’s jealousy quietly boiling and marveled at the effort which the older man must be putting in to keep the anger at bay. If Hannibal could take the jealousy and work his way through the anguished resentment of not having Will only for himself, and if Lucas could be okay with it, *genuinely* okay, there might be something ahead so *beautiful* that Will was afraid to picture it as anything more than an ethereal, hazy daydream.

End Notes

"that's how the light gets in" playlist
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5GnMg15NpbDZiuYDao6VwI?si=3605b7f8d68148a3

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